Women Learning about Sex
Lessons from the Old and New (Anti)feminism in Poland

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Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the PhD degree of King's College London is solely my own work.

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Abstract

This research study explores popular sex advice texts, such as teenage and women's magazines, not only as resources for sexual learning and the construction of sexual identities but also as potential sites where the formulation, (re)production and contestation of the dominant discourses of femininity and female sexuality take place. My examination is set within the unique and novel cultural context of Poland; a country with a long-standing tradition of dissent and an unusual location of struggle between the discourses of global neo-liberalism juxtaposed against the ideals of former socialism and the powerful tradition of Catholicism. Poland is also a location where after the systemic change in 1989, feminist activism has enjoyed an increasing popularity.

This research project is a feminist-informed examination of the discourses of female sexuality in popular culture and media that involves analyses of popular Polish sex advice materials as well as semi-structured interviews with young women in Poland, some of whom identified themselves as feminists. Apart from exploring topics relating to romantic relationships, the interviews also looked into the issues of sex education, sexualisation of culture, as well as feminist identification and consciousness. The text materials analysed included excerpts from archival Polish teenage magazines *Bravo* and *Bravo Girl!* and the popular psychology magazine for women, *Charaktery*. The analytical approaches deployed here utilised selected tools developed within discursive psychology (Edley 2001) and the textual analysis developed by Fairclough (2003).

Discursive narratives of un-readiness threaded through the participants' accounts around the themes of sex education, sexualisation and romantic love. Other girls, but predominantly not the participants themselves when they were younger, were constructed as too sexually uneducated, sexualised and misguided by the media in their understanding of what it takes to form intimate and fulfilling romantic and sexual relationships. The positive self-presentation as a sophisticated, discerning, free-thinking

and articulate individual was achieved through the juxtaposition with other persons that lacked these qualities. The social context in which these identities and counter identities were constructed was often perceived as in need of intervention and improvement, especially within the participants' accounts around sex education in Poland and the role of the newly-emergent media in the promotion of gender discrimination.

Chapter One

Introduction

Research Focus: Poland

This thesis is a feminist-informed analysis of discourses around female sexual experience, as seen in a selection of Polish sex advice texts and in sets of interviews with 18–35-year-old Polish women. My study is an investigation of a non-western, non-English setting, from the perspective of someone who possesses familiarity and an in-depth understanding of both Polish and English cultures and languages. I was born in Poland, where I also attended primary and secondary school. In 1996, four years after finishing my secondary education, I arrived in the United Kingdom and settled down permanently.

Prior to my arrival in the UK in 1989, a major systemic change took place in Eastern Europe and Poland. The Iron Curtain fell, the Berlin Wall was dismantled and Poland, from being one of the major satellite states of the Soviet Union, gradually transformed into a capitalist economy state. McDonald's outlets emerged in major cities and on the opening day of the first franchise in Warsaw, there was a queue for the delicacies on offer. Indeed, one of my friends at the time remarked that one of her favourite things to eat was a McChicken Sandwich. Furthermore, French-style hypermarkets sprouted across Poland, transforming the way food shopping was done. The same friend also enthused about the wonderful cheese with olives she could buy for her supper. Another sign of the changing architectural and cultural landscape of Warsaw was the appearance of an Ikea superstore in the city centre near the iconic Palace of Culture. The Ikea superstore represents how the transformation was gradual and progressed in stages. While initially the store held a central position in the city, with the

development of large shopping complexes in the suburbs, a few years later it moved to one of those locations.

My British husband recalls visiting Poland at the time and the vibrant markets that existed in the city centres, with stalls selling anything from smoked cheeses from the Tatra Mountains to bootleg audio tapes of obscure, British, punk rock bands. The Romani would mix, mingle and harangue in the melee of these markets, with older people selling bags of fresh produce from their allotments. These markets were swept away with the progress of change and, for example, the large market in Kraków that used to exist next to the train station, has been replaced with a modern shopping mall of glass and concrete, with endless coffee house franchises. There is a small bridge that adjoins the never-refurbished socialist-style Kraków train station, with the modern, shining shopping establishments; a symbolic metaphor of the passage between the two worlds, the old and the new.

Very often, within popular and academic discourse, countries that do not form part of the West are "othered" and assessed, usually unfavourably, according to universalist, consumer capitalist standards. Poland is often perceived from the perspective of its communist past and communism, compared to the apparently more successful and natural system of capitalism and is discursively constructed as inferior or lacking. Negative terms such as *regime*, *bloc* and *doctrine* are used routinely to distinguish socialist reality from the implied democratic order of the West, for which such terms of description are not applied. Images of the communist era in countries defined as "former Soviet bloc" connote food shortages, misery, drabness and eternal winter. With this, there is often a tendency for geographical bias and reductionism. Some studies for example: LaFont 2001 or Oláh and Fratczak 2004, explore experiences of women who occupy large areas of what is commonly understood as Eastern Europe with countries like Russia, Poland and Hungary thrown in together, whereas equivalent

studies that concentrate on other countries in close proximity to each other, such as France, Germany and England, are not common. This is not to say that experiences of women in former socialist European countries were not similar in some ways but it is a tendency almost always to portray these countries as a homogeneous "bloc" that might be troubling for the people whose experiences are routinely described in this reductive way.

Given the above, my motivation for conducting this study was to disentangle any positive influences that the Polish socialist system might have had on the lives of women in Poland, in an attempt to redress the balance of the usual very negative portrayal of this period and location. Indeed, in many ways, my experiences of growing up in socialist Poland were positive. Every year during the hot summer months, I spent three weeks on a state-subsidised holiday camps at the seaside. The children in these camps were looked after by qualified teachers, with a medical team of doctors and nurses on site. I also had an option of an additional two-week holiday at a family resort provided by the state companies for whom my parents worked. Some families were lucky like mine and had a *działka*: a small piece of land out in the country sold by the local government at a generally affordable price. There, my father built a holiday house, which we visited during summer weekends.

One of the aims of the Polish socialist state was to make culture affordable and easily accessible to everybody. I remember the Poland of my childhood and youth fondly, as a country with a sophisticated cultural landscape that had evolved in a context of expression, unrestricted by the demands of profit and advertising. In my former home city of Łódź – the third largest city, with a population of about 742,000 – there still exist an impressive number of theatres and cinemas; twenty-seven and ten respectively. The much alluded to censorship of the communist era in art and film, was

craftily evaded with the use of humour, metaphor and allegory. In the media there was an emphasis on intellectual pursuit and education.

Other commentators also voice positive experiences of growing up behind the Iron Curtain and the powerful legacy of education and culture. In the Mail Online article entitled, "Oppressive and Grey? No, Growing Up Under Communism Was the Happiest Time of My Life", Zsuzsanna Clark recounts her memories of growing up in socialist Hungary:

> The communists provided everyone with guaranteed employment, good education and free healthcare. Violent crime was virtually non-existent. But perhaps the best thing of all was the overriding sense of camaraderie, a spirit lacking in my adopted Britain and, indeed, whenever I go back to Hungary today. . . . One of the best things was the way leisure and holiday opportunities were opened up to all. . . . My parents worked in Dorog, a nearby town, for Hungaroton, a state-owned record company, so we stayed at the factory holiday camp at Lake Balaton, "The Hungarian Sea". . . . Culture was regarded as extremely important by the government. The communists did not want to restrict the finer things of life to the upper and middle classes – the very best of music, literature and dance were for all to enjoy. This meant lavish subsidies were given to institutions including orchestras, opera houses, theatres and cinemas. Ticket prices were subsidised by the State, making visits to the opera and theatre affordable. (Zsuzsanna Clark 2009)

This is a personal, anecdotal story but it reveals the central position that universal education and culture occupied in Eastern European countries. Magdalena Sokołowska gives yet another insight into the cultural and social climate in which young women grew up in socialist Poland:

> The modern young girl in Poland has a different conception of her future than that of the early suffragettes and feminists. They were of a heroic generation that renounced husbands and family. Their great-granddaughters in the Polish Peoples' Republic do not want to give up anything, unless perhaps having many children. To them the question of whether to raise a family is as much an issue as what to study and what occupation to pursue. Work is something natural, both an economic necessity and a personal need. Girls are moulded by the kind of social reality in which the majority of married women are gainfully employed. They are brought up with the conviction that each person must have a trade or profession and see no future for themselves other than in the role of working woman, even though they know that their mothers, as working women,

> face many difficulties in combining their occupational role with that of wife and mother. (Sokołowska 1977, 363)

My own experiences growing up in socialist Poland mirrored the expectations highlighted above. My mother worked full-time all her life. She was a land surveyor, whereas my father was a builder. My mother took her full-time labour participation for granted because she could rely on our grandmother's help and the state-provided after school club where I sometimes went after lessons finished. I decided to place the focus of my study in Poland because within this background, gender equality and equal participation of women in education were the ideologies that shaped the expectations of women. Within this historical context, my aim is to reflect on the legacy of socialism in Poland and to examine the influences that it might have on the issues of gender autonomy and self-realisation for young women in Poland. It is important to acknowledge here that my positive experiences of growing up and participating in Polish culture might not have been enjoyed by all women in Poland and therefore, in the context of this research project, they constitute a source of research bias. However, at the same time, considering both positive and negative aspects of the legacy of socialism is one of the aims of this study and also serves as a way of presenting an alternative understanding to the derogatory portrayals of the former "Soviet bloc" that circulate in the West.

Today, Poland is a unique site of contest between ideological legacies of former socialism, traditional Catholicism and global neo-liberalism. Here, I would like to describe two examples of Polish media entertainment that I think illustrate this interesting and diverse cultural setting and reflect the interplay of the different cultural influences that people in Poland face today. Entertainment media in Poland, like in many other locations, are an equal mixture of local, internally created programmes, as well as adapted or imported and dubbed versions of foreign items. For example, Poland

has its own version of *Cold Feet*, the British television series, largely faithfully translated but featuring protagonists who live in swanky Warsaw apartments and are somewhat younger and more exuberant than their English counterparts. As in the English original, however, the cumulative point of most episodes and the protagonists' major aspirations – irrespective of gender – revolve around "bonking". This is television that might be considered characteristic of the new globalised, commercially driven and sexualised culture, with its full capacity to offend and jar with local values and realities. To me, both the dialogues and the settings are unreal and artificial.

At the opposite end of the spectrum is another offering by Polish television, *Ojciec Mateusz* (Father Matthew), which is the Polish adaptation of the Italian *Don Matteo*. *Ojciec Mateusz* could be considered an attempt to make Catholicism more appealing or even "cool and funky" to the younger viewer. Father Matthew is played by Artur Żmijewski, who, in a 2007 poll by Polish edition of *Playboy*, was voted the most handsome and eligible actor in Poland. One of the episodes deals with the serious subject of rape. Following a school drama competition, which takes place within the grounds of a beautiful ruined castle, young people and the locals embark on a celebratory fair and party. The young, attractive actress of the winning team runs up the stairs of the castle, where, excited by the candlelight, night views and beautiful music outside, thinking she is alone, starts dancing. Unbeknown to her, one of the boys is watching her. Here, unlike in the Italian version, where seductive aspects of the dance, as well as the rape are alluded to but never actually shown, the Polish viewer is spared no sexually laden details, such as close-ups of beautiful flesh and the subsequent, quite graphic portrayal of the cruelty of rape. Topics including sexual prejudice, sexual consent and sexualisation all get treatment here, in an attempt to appeal to the savvy, modern viewer, showing that religious discourse of morality does not need to be antiquated or old-fashioned and it can deal with the difficult and contentious issues that

affect young people today. The stylistics of the episode also reveal the producers' sophisticated understanding of what it takes to secure audiences, in an age of neo-liberal market competition, where many Polish productions compete in their ability to resemble Hollywood blockbusters.

Research Focus: Sexuality and the Media

> [W]ith the collapse of other social values (religion, patriotism, family and so on), sex has been forced to take up the slack, to become our sole mode of transcendence, and our only touchstone of authenticity. The cry for scorching, multiple orgasms, the drive toward impeccable and virtuoso performance, the belief that only in complete sexual compatibility lies true intimacy, the insistence that sex is the only mode for experiencing thrills, for achieving love, for assessing and demonstrating personal worth – all these projects are absurd. (White 1980, 282)

With its ubiquitous representations and endless allusions and innuendoes, sex pervades mainstream discourses of the media. The prevailing cultural message is that in order to be healthy, we have to be sexual. The participation in regular sexual intercourse is regarded as a prerequisite for a well-functioning, close and loving relationship (Gavey, McPhillips, and Braun 1999). A glance into printed media aimed at women might suggest that women now enjoy the benefits of full emancipation and sexual liberation. This is evident in the discourse of "power" femininity that has become an influential trend within contemporary western media and advertising (Lazar 2006). Female emancipation within the sexual sphere is equated with the constant quest to acquire more knowledge about a myriad of possible sexual techniques, as well as making oneself more attractive and desirable, according to certain specifically defined and frequently reproduced canons of beauty.

Despite this apparent sexual sophistication, in Britain today sex is more often a subject of titillation and commercial exploitation, rather than a topic of serious

discussion or a real attempt at solving problems, such as high rates of teenage pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases or issues such as sexual violence. Contemporary popular culture has become increasingly saturated by sexualised representations of young, female bodies. We can observe something that could be defined as the mainstreaming and normalisation of pornography with semi-pornographic images as a visual commonplace (McRobbie 2004). Hugh Hefner's *Playboy* empire, which once constituted a seedy pornographic, strictly male only preoccupation, has become a mainstream signifier of femininity and coming of age with young girls not even of pubescent age, commercially targeted with *Playboy* pencil cases, stationery, etc.

Once on a visit to the prestigious University of Bath, I observed during the first night of Freshers' Week, that the entertainment theme was to be school uniform. The young, nineteen-year-old female students put on sexualised costumes of hot pants, stiletto heels and ties, whilst their male counterparts were wearing more conservative black trousers, white shirts and black shoes. I was astounded to observe that the dress conventions that traditionally connote the culture of ladettes on a night out, so frequently condemned by the popular media, have now transcended the boundaries of class and income. How has the school uniform become a sexualised item and why is it possible that paedophilic nuances have become normalised? Seeing the above-mentioned developments over a period of time, as well as reading a variety of sex advice materials, it struck me how female sexuality has become increasingly entangled in ideologies promoting a heteronormative and male-centric model of sexuality and femininity, based on self-objectification and sexualisation. I was also disturbed to observe how the discourse of sexual liberation obscures power differences between men and women within sexual relations.

Exploring the feminist literature around gendered practices and sexualisation, my own everyday observations were put in context and I realised that the worries that preoccupied me were in fact the subjects of long-standing formal academic investigations. Inevitably, I became interested in what ways the regulative regimes of gender and sexuality in Poland are different or similar to Western Europe. The historical context of Poland is uniquely different to the United Kingdom and my research is born out of a desire to explore, for example, if and how sexualised culture manifests itself in Poland and how Polish people engage with this phenomenon.

As a young woman, my own experiences around sex and sexuality were fraught with confusion and insecurity. On the one hand, I felt somewhat different from my female peers and perhaps more mature, because very early on I fantasised about and fancied pop stars, actors as well as young men that I encountered in my day-to-day life. I very soon became aware, however, that all these infatuations were not really valid because it was not really up to me to choose whom I wanted but rather I was supposed to wait until a suitable man, at the right time, wanted me. I was quite perplexed as to how exactly this was meant to come about and exactly what I would have to do to make it happen. In secondary school, although I knew a few girls who had many boyfriends and their sexual initiations behind them, my closer friends were usually the girls who, like me, were rather confused by the dynamics of love and romance and even more about the processes of sexual encounter. Despite this, I felt covert but overwhelming embarrassment about not having a proper boyfriend, without whom my existence seemed to be lacking. I, like many other young women in Poland, was becoming aware that my task was to avoid the shameful fate of ending up a spinster.

As time went by and when I finally started to interact with male counterparts, I became aware of another implicit pressure to begin having sex, which in reality meant participating in genital intercourse. Nobody, however, explained what I should do

about the possibility that intercourse might mean unwanted pregnancy. Talk about this obvious risk was almost non-existent. I was shocked that the practice, with such potentially dramatic and life-changing implications, could be taken so lightly. The availability of information about contraception was also extremely scarce. Condoms were not, like today, easily visible on the shop or kiosk shelf. Was I supposed to buy expensive oral contraceptives and use them every day, "just on the off chance"? I knew about vaginal suppositories but I was warned that they were not really reliable.

Finally, as a grown-up woman entering mutual heterosexual relationships, I realised that most of the time I did not really enjoy genital intercourse and other sexual activities were more pleasurable for me. Reading numerous sex advice texts, I was reassured that my initial dislike for vaginal intercourse was typical and it would pass after a couple of years, when I would gradually become more sexually adept. When the expected transformation did not take place and the texts I read continued to lack any specific explanations about how exactly this promised metamorphosis was going to occur, I became increasingly critical of modern sex advice. Today, many years later, embarking on the course of doctoral study gave me a perfect opportunity to explore this pertinent issue within a more formal and academically informed mode of inquiry. However, my interest was also to find out directly how other women engage with sex advice materials and if they also experience similar dissonance.

During one of my visits to Poland I came across a publication entitled, "Jak Czerpać Radość z Seksu" (How to Source Joy from Sex), which was to become another impetus for this study. The publication consisted of three booklets: "O Nim Dla Dwojga" (All About Him for Her and Him), "O Niej Dla Dwojga" (All About Her for Him and Her) and "Życie We Dwoje" (The Life Together) and constituted free supplements to a Polish weekly women's magazine from the lower end of the market entitled, *Poradnik Domowy* (Housewife's Guide, 2006). The booklets were a more

modern instance of the kind of sex advice texts that I used to read when I was a young woman and the following excerpt from one of the booklets is representative of the very prevalent understanding of female sexuality and sexual pleasure which troubled me ever since:

> Sexologists sometimes joke that their work would be much easier but their incomes lower if the Creator, whilst inventing woman, placed the clitoris inside the vagina, so that it would be more likely that a woman could reach an orgasm, during intercourse, as easily as a man. Unfortunately, nature deemed that this small and most sensitive point that serves the sole purpose of giving a woman sexual pleasure, is situated far from the area stimulated by a penis during intercourse and the erogenous zones of a woman are located in different parts of her body. ("O Niej Dla Dwojga", 46)

This text represents one of many demonstrations of sexual advice embedded within the tradition of the "coital imperative", which will be discussed in depth in later chapters. The light-heartedly presented "problem" rests upon the rhetorical understanding of female sexuality as flawed and not fitting in well within the established definition of sex, namely penis-in-vagina intercourse. Reading sexual advice texts like the one above, my own impression is that in trying to fit women's anatomy into a socially determined compulsory heterosexist framework, sex experts routinely problematise female sexuality and complicate the mechanics of female sexual arousal, leaving the reader confused, with more questions than answers and, most importantly, fail the objective of providing useful, practical and unbiased sexual advice. A US feminist scholar, Lisa Wade (2010, 14), gives an illuminating account of the effects of male-centric ideologies of sex and sexuality. She observes that, the most frequent female sexual complaint, the lack of orgasm during genital intercourse is not the result of the faulty physiology but:

- An environment that encourages male sexual subjectivity and the (self-) objectification of women.
- Definition of sex that prioritizes men's pleasure.

- A de-prioritization of women's sexual pleasure in practice, likely by both men and women.
- A mythology that affirms this de-prioritization as natural and normal.

My reading of feminist literature around sexuality and sex advice in the earlier stages of preparation for this project has helped me gain a greater understanding of the ideological context within which these texts are created and the rhetorical patterns according to which female sexuality is constructed.

Study Rationale and Methods

While exploring research literature around sexuality and the media and reading magazines' readership studies, I became aware of the importance of not only looking into texts but also considering what these texts mean for their readers. I decided to venture beyond a text-analysis-only approach and inquire critically how readers engage with texts and how they position themselves within the discourses purveyed by them. Therefore, for this PhD project, I conducted and analysed interviews as well as the texts, which the participants identified as the sources that supported their sexual learning, such as teenage *Bravo* magazines. This is an ambitious project, which attempts to map largely uncharted territory and explores many themes that have not been widely researched before by western academics, or presented to a western audience. My goal for this project is to provide a fresh and novel insight into the under-researched topics of sexual learning, female sexual experience and the representations of femininity in Poland.

Research Questions

The aim of my research is to investigate the role that sex advice materials, including women's magazines, play in shaping the narratives around the topics of

female sexuality, as well as sexual and relationship satisfaction. More specifically, I will attempt to explore how women in Poland engage with the discourses of sexuality that came to dominate the Polish cultural landscape after the system change in 1989. I will also endeavour to determine if Poland's unique historical and cultural setting effected different regulative regimes and ideologies of gender and sexuality. Poland is a country with a unique timeline for the development of its contemporary feminist movement (see Chapters Three and Nine). It is also a country with a history of presumed gender equality, espoused during the former socialist era, which might affect commonsensical understandings around the topics that are of interest to me here.

By basing my study within the unique perspective of Poland, I hope to provide a fresh insight into the lived experiences of women in a non-western location and reflect back on more global discourses of sexuality, sex and relationships from this perspective. For example, the post-feminist discourse – dominant in locations where magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* already have a long-standing legacy – hails women as sexually liberated, confident and desiring actors and presumes sexual equality between men and women. I am interested in finding out how this discourse, now manifest in Poland, co-exists with Poland's own, socialist era originated notion of equality of genders.

I also want to explore diverse expressions of female sexuality in Poland. Here, my motivation for the recruitment of feminist participants becomes pertinent. I am a feminist myself but this is not the only reason for being interested in what other Polish feminists have to say. Feminist activism enjoys increasing popularity, as well as media coverage in Poland. In viewing this significant position of feminism in Poland, as well as considering the socialist-derived notion of gender equality, I feel that it is invaluable and important to include the voices of feminist participants in this project.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter Two includes a discussion of the relevant research literature around sexuality, sex education, teenage and women's magazines, the sex advice profession and ethnographic readership studies, written from the perspective of researchers in countries such as the United Kingdom, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. In **Chapter Three** I present a further context for my study by providing a historical and cultural overview that examines women roles and status in Poland. Here, I explore a wide array of issues such as the notion of gender egalitarianism and the powerful ethos of education, as well as the influence of Catholic tradition, the changes within the reproductive laws, the status of school sex education and the transformation of women's press in Poland.

The methods I deployed for data collection and analysis, including the analysis of interview and textual data, as well as the methodological challenges and dilemmas are outlined in **Chapter Four**. **Chapter Five** is the first analytical chapter of this thesis devoted specifically to a text analysis of two Polish sexual self-help materials: a contemporary popular science magazine for women entitled, *Charaktery* and post-1989 archival issues of teenage magazine, *Bravo*.

In **Chapter Six**, I further explore the topics introduced within the textual analysis and contextualise the analysed texts in ethnographic data. Specifically, in this chapter I present the interpretative repertoires that threaded through the informants' narratives around sex education in Poland. **Chapter Seven** explores how the phenomenon of sexualisation of culture in Poland, which constitutes a backdrop for sexual learning in Poland, was perceived by the respondents in this study. Here, I examine the interpretative repertoires, self-presentation and identity work that characterised the participants' talk about sexualisation.

In **Chapter Eight** I interrogate the participants' narratives about forming and sustaining happy romantic relationships and specifically, in this chapter, I explore how the interviewees constructed *satisfaction* in relationships. In **Chapter Nine** I investigate feminist consciousness and identity construction within the context of both the opportunities afforded by flourishing women's movements and the challenges presented by pejorative ideological associations that the feminist viewpoint attracts in Poland. Finally, in the last chapter, **Chapter Ten**, I attempt to tie the threads together and provide the summarising discussion of the chapters, including the research implications as well as the challenges and dilemmas for future research within this area.

Chapter Two

The Study of Sexuality and Sex Advice

Foucault and Morality

> Eros, who was a god for the Ancients, is a problem for the Moderns (de Rougemont 1963, 3).

This research project deals with sexuality and the French philosopher and writer, Michel Foucault, had a profound influence on how the modern theories of sexuality have developed. Indeed, the understanding of sexuality and its status within modern culture, originally proposed by Foucault in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1978), provides a useful starting point for the discussion of literature that has informed my project. Foucault contested the previously formulated notion that western societies have experienced a repression of sexuality since the seventeenth century. For Foucault, there was no such thing as innate sexuality that was held in check and repressed by mores and morals but instead sexuality and sexual identities were constituted within the proliferation of ubiquitous discourses around sex. Indeed, Foucault observed that talk around sexuality has taken centre stage in everyday discourse. "What is peculiar to modern societies, in fact, is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it *ad infinitum*, while exploiting is as *the* secret" (1978, 35, emphasis in original).

Foucault observed also that through the incessant talk about sex, sexuality has been turned into something problematic. Sexuality has been spoken about abundantly but mostly in order to sanction it. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, through "the political economy of population" (1978, 26) sex became increasingly an

object of scrutiny and regulation. At the heart of the "population" problem – a newly emergent political and economic concept with variables such as birth and death rates, life expectancy, fertility and state of health – was sex. Therefore, "the sexual conduct of the population was taken both as an object of analysis and as a target of intervention" (26). A proliferation of discourses on sexuality in the fields of medicine, psychiatry, criminal justice, pedagogy and social work emerged. The new *scientia sexualis* (the science of sexuality) sought to generate the true discourse of sex. The knowledge about sexuality was extracted and disseminated into science through the traditional technique of confession. At the same time, sexuality has "come to be considered the privileged place where our deepest 'truth' is read and expressed" (1988, 111). Confession was not only a technique formalised within the context of Christian penance or the therapeutic process of psychoanalysis, but also an everyday, truth-generating practice carried out in private and in public in the presence of parents, educators, doctors and loved ones. Through this technology of confession, discourses of truth and sex have evolved side by side to constitute the knowledge about modern sexuality and the self.

The notion that sex is still a highly problematic, as well as a social, political and moral matter, is evident without the need of an in-depth discussion or a long search for an example. In Britain, "teenage pregnancy is rising, within a moral climate so bitter that when Boots opened a clinic offering free contraception to under-age girls, it caused outrage" (Orr 1999). When in 2009 the British government confirmed a new proposal to introduce basic sex and relationship education from the age of five (Paton 2008), some commentators complained, "The sooner we are taught about it, the sooner we try it" and "As much as I agree that we must educate our children in order to protect them, it is a shame we are robbing them of their innocence (Metro Letters 2009, 34).

Conversely, the prevailing "societal message [of today's 'liberal' West] is that you have to be sexual, you have to want to be sexual, you have to be good at being

sexual, and you have to be normally sexual" (Tiefer 1995, 129). The idea of active, "healthy" sexuality as a prerequisite of self-fulfilment is evident in the ubiquity of advisory and self-help material devoted to sex and relationships in virtually all types of popular media. It forms a part of a larger prevailing zeitgeist generally defined as sexual liberation. The advances within the technologies of reproduction and particularly the invention of the pill in the 1960s brought a new era and a new discourse that posited that both sexes could freely participate in sex without worrying about the possibility of unplanned pregnancy. The sexual revolution meant apparent open-mindedness about any issues of sex as long as it involved consenting adults. Discourses of sexual liberation suggest that the traditional formulation of female (hetero)sexuality has been transformed, emphasising pleasure for both partners (Jackson 1984) and introducing the notion of "reciprocity" (Braun, Gavey, and McPhillips 2003; Gilfoyle, Wilson, and Brown 1992) within sexual encounters.

Wendy Hollway: Gender Subjectivity and Discourse

In her influential feminist study of subjectivity and discourse Wendy Hollway (1984) identified three dominant discourses of gendered sexualities that differentiated the experiences and expectations of men and women within romantic relationships. These discourses included the "male sexual drive" discourse, the "permissive" discourse and the "have/hold" discourse. Hollway's work is positioned within an important turning point that took place within the feminist movement in the West during the 1980s. More and more women protested their exclusion or marginalisation by a feminism that claimed to be speaking for all women. This dissatisfaction gave a rise to something that is broadly defined within the popular historical account as the third-wave feminism. (It is important to stress here that there is a disagreement amongst feminists about the exact definition of the term as well as the usefulness of the "wave"

metaphor or what it represents.) Generally, the third-wave theory emphasised discursive power and the ambiguity of gender as a category (Butler 1990). It sought to challenge the earlier essentialist formulations of femininity that were criticised for being based predominantly on the experiences of upper middle-class western white women (Heywood and Drake 1997).

Of particular interest for my discussion here, however, is how the new definitions proposed by feminists conceptualised power. Rather than seeing it as operating in a linear, top-down fashion, where one group exercises power over another, within the transformed understanding the emphasis is on power as a "multidimensional relation" (Cameron 1992, 160). In simpler terms, this could mean that – although being subordinate to her white middle-class husband – a white middle-class woman might enjoy power over male subordinates who are Black or working class. In more complex terms, the understanding of power is "Foucauldian", that is subtle, diffuse, ungraspable and exercised through ideology or discourse rather than through outright coercion. As Deborah Cameron (1992, 160) illustrates this, "no-one has to threaten little girls with violence to get them to desire 'feminine' things like dolls and pretty dresses. . . . Men, even white middle-class ones, are not like an industrial cartel, meeting . . . to plan how they can subordinate women most effectively". Wendy Hollway is one of the first theorists to consider the relevance of the Foucauldian understanding of power within the feminist influenced studies of psychology (Wetherell 2001). I will discuss three discourses of sexuality identified by Wendy Hollway in the following subsections.

The "Male Sexual Drive" Discourse

> CHLOE: I just realize the total lack of my belief in any right to say to somebody- Like if someone was standing on my foot I'd fucking tell her- Someone's got their penis in my vagina and they're grinding away and I don't feel able to ask them to stop. It's *just ridiculous*! Honestly, it's just the pits. I mean there's a hell of a lot of powerful stuff going on- (Gavey 1992, 335, emphasis in original)

The "male sexual drive" discourse prevails both within everyday common-sense assumptions as well as the opinions of experts that see men's sexuality as a product of a biological drive, whose function is the reproduction of the species with sexual intercourse as its means. This biological drive determines the men's basic need for sex which they cannot ignore and which must be satisfied. They "are expected to be sexually incontinent and out of control – 'it's only natural'" (Hollway 1984, 232). Hollway quotes a man friend of hers to illustrate this: "I want to fuck, I *need* to fuck. I've always needed and wanted to fuck. From my teenage years, I've always longed for fucking" (231, emphasis in original).

"The male sexual drive discourse not only constructs male sexuality as driven by biological imperative, but represents women as potential triggers, which can set it in motion" (Burr 2003, 77). According to the male sexual drive discourse women, on the other hand, source their pleasure from being desired. Within the male sexual drive discourse, female sexuality is framed in opposition to male sexuality; it is inferior, reactive and receptive.

The Permissive Discourse

The sexual imperative discussed in the previous section was framed within another discourse identified by Hollway (1984), namely the "permissive" discourse. Wendy Hollway (1984, 234) believes however that, "In assuming that sexuality is

entirely natural and therefore should not be repressed, the permissive discourse is the offspring of the male sexual drive discourse". Hollway, as well as many other feminist writers (e.g. Campbell 1980; Jackson 1994), argue that the discourses of sexual affirmation of the permissive era were really a celebration of masculine sexuality. This is because the practices of the permissive turn never transformed the conservative gender positions but obscured "the differential effects of permissiveness on men and women" (Campbell 1980, quoted by Hollway 1984, 235). Janice Winship (1987, 113) in her discussion of the popular purveyor of the permissive discourse, the *Cosmopolitan* magazine, argues that its emphasis on finding oneself through sex is characterised by the tendency to "cut sexuality off from the rest of social activity". The existence of any power dimensions is never discussed but "what women and men centrally drag into bed are the uneven and protean power relations insidiously working to support masculine sexuality".

Margaret Jackson (1994, 2) in her historical overview of the science of sexology maintains that the sexual revolution of the sixties was – from the perspective of women – not a revolution at all, as it was based on "an ideology which legitimated male sexual values and practices and functioned to make women's bodies ever more accessible to male sexual demands". Writing about the famous sex reformer, Marie Stopes, and her role as a pioneer of birth control, Margaret Jackson comments:

> The emphasis on birth control, which was intended to give women control over their own bodies, made it more difficult for women to resist a sexual practice which many of them experienced as oppressive, and to define their own sexual needs and desires. (Jackson 1994, 155)

Jackson notes that some feminists, such as Frances Prewett, opposed the birth control ideology claiming that "it was hypocritical to declare that birth control gave women 'the right to the control of her own body'" and the cause championed by birth controllers

was “a man’s solution for a man’s problem” (151). This could be further illustrated with the quote from the research conducted by Annie Potts:

> Agnes: [W]ith the loss of that art of saying “no, it’s not safe at the moment” , came the loss of the woman’s ability to say “no”. . . . And to assert that, “No it’s not a good time for penetration today or this week”, so I think women by and large have lost out, because now you ask a 16-year-old girl “Do you ask your boyfriend to wear a condom?” and they go hee hee hee (giggles). They can’t because they’re not used to sort of asserting their rhythm method, if you like, or their fertility, or their desire, you know. “No I don’t feel like it now.” Because for 30 years we’re had the pill and men are used to having sex whenever, at any time of the month, and life. So the negotiation between the partners has broken down. It’s an *art*. (Potts 2002, 184, emphasis in original)

The “Have/Hold” Discourse

> The normative discourse about sex is afraid of nothing more than female desire and understands nothing less than female sexuality. (Tasso 2009, 97)

While the permissive discourse promotes unrestricted sexual pursuit for all, the third dominant discourse of sexuality identified by Wendy Hollway (1984), the “have/hold” discourse, nurtures the Christian ideals associated with long-term heterosexual partnership and family life. According to this discourse, female sexual actualisation is necessarily fulfilled in the context of a heterosexual marriage and motherhood. Here again, “women’s sexuality is seen as a lack; the possibility avoided by the stress on their relationship with husband and children” (232–233). However to account for the conflicting demands of the male sexual drive discourse, there is a split within the have/hold discourse: a dichotomy which categorises women into wives and mistresses, virgins and whores, Mary and Eve. More contemporarily, a woman is expected to be both things. The contradiction goes further. Underneath the insistence on female asexuality, there is a belief that female sexuality is inevitable and dangerous, and therefore must be controlled.

The study by Hollway (1984) demonstrates the discourses in action providing accounts of how male participants simultaneously positioned themselves as subjects of the male sexual drive discourse but objects of the have/hold discourse. The men routinely disavowed the need for the intimacy of a close and secure relationship, and suppressed their own wishes to "have and hold" while positioning women as requiring commitment. "The reproduction of women as subjects of a discourse concerning the desire for intimate and secure relationships protects men from the risk associated with their own need (and the consequent power it would give women)" (245–246). The conflation of the permissive discourse informed by the male sex drive imperative and the have/hold discourse continues to inform the normative formulations of female sexuality.

The "Coital Imperative"

> In a lot of ways, when we're talking about sexuality, especially female sexuality, the world gets it backwards in how it presents what real-deal sex is and isn't. (Corinna 2008)

An important tenet of the male sexual drive discourse discussed in the previous section is something framed by Jackson (1984) as the "coital imperative", where both men and women regard the term "sex" as synonymous with coital intercourse (McPhillips, Braun, and Gavey 2001). In other words, within the coital imperative penis-in-vagina intercourse is the most natural and fundamental sexual practice and an essential goal of human sexual expression. All other sexual practices, such as kissing, touching, oral sex, are seen as preliminaries or optional extras to the "real thing" (Potts 2002). Therefore, terms such as "having sex" or "intercourse" have become synonymous with coitus in western culture, when they could in fact signify any kind of sexual behaviour or interaction. This understanding prevails despite the fact that, as

Gavey, McPhillips and Braun (1999, 35) point out, “the particular bodily mechanics of intercourse mean that it carries considerably higher risks (of disease and unwanted conception for example) than other forms of sex”.

Much has been critically written across times about the coital imperative and the equating of human sexuality with the reproductive function (for example: Jackson 1987; 1994; Gavey, McPhillips, and Braun 1999; Gavey 2005; McPhillips, Braun, and Gavey 2001). The coital imperative remains intimately associated with the reproductive model of sexuality. As Margaret Jackson (1987, 73) puts it, “by equating human sexual desire with a coital imperative, i.e. a biological drive to copulate, “sex” is ultimately reduced to a reproductive function”. This insistence on the reproductive “need” prevails despite the readily available biological fact that, unlike most other animals, humans can potentially respond sexually at any time and therefore their sexual activity cannot be exclusively linked to reproduction (Tiefer 1995). Already in 1956, Frank Beach argued that sexual drive had nothing to do with “genuine biological or tissue needs” and that the concept should be replaced with “sexual appetite”, which is “a product of experience, . . . [with] little or no relation to biological or physiological needs” (quoted in Tiefer 1995, 42). Even earlier, the feminist thinker, Frances Swiney (1912), argued that there was “no living organism so completely under the tyranny of sex as the human male”. She dismissed the naturalistic argument and, drawing on evidence from biology, physiology and anthropology, demonstrated that male sexual “incontinence” rather than being “natural” was a violation of natural law and “perversion of physiological truth” (quoted in Jackson 1994, 83).

The coital imperative prevails (McPhillips, Braun and Gavey 2001) despite the advent of HIV and AIDS (Messiah et al. 1995) and modern transformations within technologies that suggest the possibility of a separation of sexual activity from reproduction:

> Ironically, actual reproduction of the human species is increasingly separated from coitus not only by cultural shifts privileging contraceptives and sex-for-pleasure, but by the enormously popular new assisted reproductive technologies whereby people begin in petri dishes and test tubes. (Tiefer 2004, 438)

Conversely, the innovations within birth control often act to bolster the coital imperative by fostering the implicit understanding of contraception, especially the oral method, as an ultimate, easy-to-use and once-and-for-all solution for all the problems that might have earlier prevented us from enjoying regular sex. As Deborah Orr of the *Independent* (1999) puts it, "It is as if the very existence of the pill protects us from pregnancy". However, no contraceptive method is without its pitfalls. Aside from potential serious health risks, the pill seems to have a detrimental effect on the very thing it is prescribed for, the enjoyment of sex, because it is often associated with the loss of libido (Laurance 2005). The shortcomings of oral contraception are not often a topic for discussion within the mainstream discourses of sex and regular coital sex continues to enjoy its privileged position as both a form of recreation and a prerequisite of a well-functioning and loving relationship (Gavey, McPhillips and Braun 1999; McPhillips, Braun and Gavey 2001).

Margaret Jackson (1987) notes that many feminists have stressed that – whether or not penetration is essential to men's sexual pleasure – it is by no means necessary for female sexual pleasure and, in fact, often interferes with this. Medical sexology studies by Kinsey et al. (1953) and Masters and Johnson (1966) long ago revealed that vaginal intercourse is not the best form of sexual activity when a woman's pleasure is to be considered. This is because there are no nerve endings in the interior walls of the vagina and a majority of women are reported to achieve orgasm through clitoral stimulation. (This is, nevertheless, a subject of an ongoing and heated debate, for example see Smith 2008).

Anne Koedt (1970) explored the "myth of vaginal orgasm" and argued that, for women, there are many areas of sexual arousal, but only one area of sexual climax, that of the clitoris. As well as citing the studies by Kinsey and Masters and Johnson, Koedt quotes the anatomical evidence by George Lombard Kelly (1951) who likens a clitoris to a small penis that is similarly composed of erectile tissue. Koedt argues that the myth of vaginal orgasm persists not because of the lack of understanding about the subject but because sexual penetration is preferred by men as the optimal stimulant for the penis and a penis is the epitome of masculinity. It is not in men's interests to acknowledge that women's orgasms are not dependent on vaginal intercourse. Therefore despite the finding, as Scully and Bart (2003, 13) point out, even Kinsey continued to cling to the idea of the vaginal orgasm as the most appropriate and mature sexual response. "The doctor seems to be involved in a form of projection in which the power struggle that he imagines between the clitoris and the vagina actually represent a parallel struggle between the sexes".

Despite the efforts of many feminists to alter the powerful status of coitus within the heterosexual script, as Leonore Tiefer (1995, 165) concludes, these attempts "merely added the clitoris to the standard phallocentric script". Female orgasm through clitoral stimulation is only a detour and, following the Freudian model, the clitoris is "the organ *through which* excitement is transmitted to . . . the true locus of woman's erotic life . . . the vagina" (Laqueur 1990, 235, emphasis in original). This understanding of the female orgasm linked to the late nineteenth-century psychoanalytic theories of healthy female sexuality prevails "with many women and men continuing to regard vaginal orgasms achieved though coitus as the healthiest and the most desired outcome of heterosexual activity" (Potts 2002, 37). The concept of "female frigidity" has been constructed to label those women unable or unwilling to "educate" their vaginas to achieve orgasm through coitus and have their sexual instinct awakened to learn to enjoy

and desire vaginal penetration (Jackson 1987, 68). Far from empowering women, this phallocentric model of sexuality as Jackson (1994, 155) points out, "reinforces male power in heterosexual relationships by eroticizing male dominance and female submission".

Feminist research studies demonstrated that the pressure to comply with the norms of sexuality defined within the male sexual drive and coital imperative framework has a pernicious and enduring influence on the lives of women. Even in the context of harsh social and economic conditions, as well as laws forbidding abortion and the use of contraception, most women still engage in vaginal intercourse despite deriving little or no pleasure from it (see the study in Romania by Baban and David 1994). The study by Nicola Gavey (1992) into women's experiences of unwanted or coerced sex carried out in New Zealand, similarly showed that some women felt unable to stop their partners from imposing coital intercourse on them even if it was not only emotionally but also physically damaging for them. Gavey quotes a participant who was deemed by her doctor to be "psychologically undone" as she endured her husband "penetrating her before she was even awake, and when she was pregnant" and when "it was just so *painful*, she just couldn't bear it" (341, emphasis in original).

Neo-liberalism and Female Sexuality

> The media has become the key site for defining codes of sexual conduct. It casts judgement and establishes the rules of play. Across these many channels of communication feminism is routinely disparaged. Why is feminism so hated? (McRobbie 2009, 15–16)

The above quote from Angela McRobbie's *The Aftermath of Feminism* describes a process generally defined as feminist backlash or the undoing of feminism by which "feminist gains of the 1970s and 1980s are actively and relentlessly undermined" (11).

As Michelle Lazar (2009, 339) points out, “There cannot be any discussion about feminism today in contemporary societies without some reference at least to ‘postfeminism’”. According to the sentiments of post-feminism, women’s liberation in the western world is now a fact rendering feminism as no longer needed: a spent force, out of date and “uncool”. Now that the important battles of feminism have taken place and been won, women can enjoy the rewards of their secured equal status and are encouraged to see themselves as “grateful subjects of modern states and cultures” (McRobbie 2009, 27).

McRobbie (2009) points out that the decline of feminism is offset by the rise of consumer capitalism that now appropriates and mainstreams many women’s issues and concerns that were previously associated with feminism. Although some commentators (for example, Squire 1997) are prepared to consider the positive role of post-feminism in the popularisation of feminist ideals, other are less favourable seeing it in terms of an antifeminist backlash (Faludi 1992) or a device that appropriated feminist values for discourses devoid of any radical and political content that are often premised on the notion of feminism as accomplished (Goldman 1992; Hollows 2000). As feminism gets assimilated into the popular discourse, it often gets “othered” as extreme, difficult and unpalatable (Tasker and Negra 2007). A paradox here is, however, that while many women feel entitled to enjoy and would not be glad to relinquish the gains secured for them by the previous generations of women that were united by the political force of feminism, they nevertheless actively repudiate the very political ideology that enabled these benefits (Douglas 1995).

Angela McRobbie in the above-mentioned work (2009, 12) argues further that the social and political realities of young women in the West are determined by something defined as “double entanglement”, which “comprises the co-existence of neo-conservative values in relation to gender, sexuality, and family life, . . . with

processes of liberalisation in regard to choice and diversity in domestic, sexual, and kinship relations". More specifically, within the "sexual contract" of the new meritocratic order introduced by Tony Blair in the UK, social inclusion of young women is conditional on their continuing sexual regulation. They are expected to take a double role: a compromise of having a career but not going "too far" and – when the time is right – having a family as well (McRobbie 2009, 81–82). In other words, women are to utilise their newly acquired autonomy and freedom to ultimately re-embark on the pursuit of traditional femininity, this time out of their own choice. Therefore, the notion of heterosexual relationships as an ultimate goal of women's self-actualisation prevails, albeit reworked to fit the new post-feminist ideals of female emancipation and empowerment.

Rosalind Gill (2009) in her analysis of sex and relationships advice in *Glamour*, a popular monthly magazine targeted at women in their 20s and 30s, showed that for a modern female to exercise her emancipation she has to participate in a sophisticated empowerment project of personal entrepreneurship, self-improvement and self-regulation. Relationships are like business ventures. For every woman there is a "Mr Right" out there but finding and keeping him is an ongoing challenge demanding determination. Finding your perfect man involves an understanding of what you want in a partner and then deploying every strategy available to "snatch" him. Maintaining a successful relationship, on the other hand, means knowing what he wants and how to please him, which requires "learning to read men, and paying attention to their sexual and emotional needs" (21).

As far as the sexual sphere is concerned, the post-feminist discourse of female emancipation sees women as autonomous and active sexual subjects. Within the era of the "*Cosmopolitan* woman" (Potts 2002, 37) first manifest in the 1990s, the popular media discourse of "power" femininity (Lazar 2006, Gill 2008) hails women as desiring

sexual actors who achieved sexual liberation and strive towards sexual self-actualisation. In other words, women are now expected to actively seek and initiate sexual encounters, as well as entitled to enjoy sex and to reach full sexual realisation. They are encouraged to view sex not only as something self-defining and important but also as something that is positive and something that they deserve. "You just have to give sex the same priority you do to everything else in your life which you cherish" advises *Glamour* magazine (September 2005, quoted in Gill 2009, 361).

Many critical studies into women's magazines questioned their apparent liberated stance. For example, McMahon (1990, 381) noted that *Cosmopolitan* "acknowledges women's sexual desires and subjectivity and subverts them by subsuming sexuality under codes for rationality and control". Caldas-Coulthard (1996, 268–269) showed that "the first person narratives [of women's magazines] that are supposedly transgressive are transgressive only in terms of a traditional view of human sexuality and sexual relations: to be happy a woman should be in a long-term heterosexual relationship". Similarly, Laura Carpenter (1998) demonstrated that although editors of magazines for women presented a range of constructions around sexuality, they continued to depict dominant, hetero-normative scripts of sexuality as preferable to other available scenarios. And as Pantea Farvid and Virginia Braun (2006) argue, although the content of the magazines is dominated by the "liberated woman motif", they keep on purveying the old "snagging and keeping a guy" ideology; however, "today's technique is great sex rather than great cooking" (Gauntlett 2002, 190; cited in Farvid and Braun 2006, 307).

The discursive pattern of "men-ology" was what Rosalind Gill (2009, 354) identified as one of leading themes of magazines such as *Glamour* or *Cosmopolitan*. Within this theme, women are instructed how to be attentive to men's emotional and sexual needs. They are supposed to be adventurers ready to explore and invent their

own original sexual tricks to keep their partners interested and stop them from straying. Here, the focus is not on a woman's pleasure and satisfaction but on keeping sexual techniques and skills up to date and "pushing the boundaries of what is possible" (361) only to invariably facilitate the predictable outcome of heterosexual penetrative intercourse. Whatever the advice relates to, there seems to be a wearisome insistence on the onus always being on a woman not only to work around the "unchanging (or unchangeable) masculine ways" and to "make things work in relationships" (Farvid and Braun 2006, 306–307) while in crisis, but also to balance the difficult act of solving a problem without harming the fragile ego of her partner.

This quest of self-improvement is not as in the earlier, pre-feminist eras understood to be merely instrumental behaviour deployed to "please and keep a man" but seen as done out of one's own choice and to please oneself. Gill (2007a) points out that the notions of empowerment, agency and choice are central to the post-feminist discourse of the contemporary media. The insistence on choice and empowerment as the unquestionable traits of women's emancipation taking place in all areas of life could be seen as embedded within a larger discourse defined by Elspeth Probyn as the discourse of "choiceoisie" (1993). Here, the emphasis is on personal choice that is unburdened by wider social and political ramifications of gender inequality and subordination.

Gill (2007a) argues that whereas in the past, media representations of women were outright objectifying, the contemporary sexualised equivalents are organised around sexual confidence and autonomy. In this new guise, they proclaim the freedom to "have it all", "do it all" and most of all "do it for oneself". This apparent shift, however, represents a more insidious and exploitative sort of objectification masquerading as subjectification. The objectifying male gaze becomes internalised by women and, in exchange for the promise of power, compels them to exercise a form of

self-disciplinary control – the bodily regime of self-aestheticisation whose aim is to mould oneself for the male defined version of female desirability. As Tincknell and colleagues (2003, 52) put it, the "complicity in objectification" signifies the "access to a liberated and 'modern' subjectivity", whereas "sexual availability is effectively recast as autonomy".

Discourses of Sexuality and Early Sexual Learning

In today's Britain, rather than a topic of a serious discussion, sex continues to be a subject of titillation or commercial exploitation. Contemporary popular culture has become increasingly saturated by sexualised representations of young female bodies. McRobbie (1996) observes that magazines aimed at young females have become so loaded with sexual material that the meanings of being a young woman are mostly addressed through sexuality. Within the recent dominant representational practice of "porno chic", soft-pornographic images are a visual commonplace (McRobbie 2004). As the codes of pornography permeate the mainstream, practices once associated with the sex industry – such as striptease, pole or lap dancing – are not only endorsed now as fully legitimate and "socially acceptable entertainment for supposedly respectable men in certain circles" (Toynbee 2008, 26) but also promoted by some women's magazines as the ways to enhance one's sexual skills and satisfaction (Gill 2009). And pre-adolescent girls as young as five are not only the subjects of what Polly Toynbee defines as "girlification" (2009) or Abi and Emma Moore of the "PinkStinks" campaign as "pinkification" but also become the targets of sexualised promotions. Thong underwear, Playboy-branded stationery and dolls in fishnet tights are marketed at this very young audience (Gill 2007a).

Not surprisingly then, young women learn to experience their femininity as bodily and their sexual identities as derived from the management of the body according

to narrowly (male) defined criteria of female desirability. Nancy Lesko (1988) argues that for young women the transition from childhood to adulthood and becoming sexually mature is marked by learning not only to read their body as sexual but also to take responsibility for that attribute. This emphasis on responsibility is a staple facet of discourses of young female sexuality. Young women can be sexually active as long as they know how to avoid risk and practice safe sex (McRobbie 1996) and often they alone are held accountable for protecting both their own and their partner's health (Harris, Aapola, and Gonick 2000). As Tincknell and colleagues (2003, 60) put it, "Taking responsibility for heterosexual relationships, then, is the only way in which young women are (still) allowed to enter them".

The scope of young women's sexual responsibility extends far beyond the prevention of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. They are also appointed to exercise the difficult gatekeeper act of managing the powerful male sex drive by being sexually alluring and available but not too available at the same time (Lees 1986). They are deemed to possess the emotional intelligence to be able "to decode, and then manage, masculinity in appropriate ways" (Tincknell et al. 2003, 60). Sex education materials are explicit about adolescent male sexual desire and instruct girls not only to recognise it as powerful but also to be responsible for keeping guard over it. Sue Lees (1993) observes that within this discourse of responsibility, male lust once aroused is seen as uncontrollable. The arousal results from girls' "provocative" behaviour. Fashion and media industries encourage flaunting sexuality by young women; however, in rape trials, the details of behaviour and clothing of the woman complainant is routinely scrutinised for any hints that might suggest her possible consent or invitation.

Whereas sexually appropriate conduct and sexual maturity for women is linked to responsibility and the ability to manage risk, experiencing sexuality positively and autonomously is the privilege of men. While young men are routinely positioned within

the discourse of “sexual entitlement”, young women remain trapped within the discourse of passivity and “sexual accommodation” (Tolman 1991). Here, the sexual subjectivities of young females are hardly acknowledged. The influential study by Michelle Fine (1988), who termed this problem the “missing discourse of desire”, highlighted the multiple ways in which in the North American school system young women’s sexuality was problematised and their articulations of sexual agency, own pleasure and desire were routinely muted, undermined or de-legitimised.

Tolman (1996) explored the missing discourse of desire and observed that adolescent girls were often unsure if the feelings they had were in fact desire. In another study, Tolman (1994) showed that the sexual accounts of young women were confused by the contradiction between the reality of their sexual feelings and the culture that denigrates the expression of such feelings. Many girls feared the consequence of sexual pleasure leading to danger, especially of pregnancy, and did not know what to do when they felt desire. Not surprising then is the finding by Thompson (1990) that young women often participated in sexual acts where they had little desire for their partners and for reasons other than experiencing own pleasure. Both masculine and feminine sexual identities develop in relation to a hegemonic masculinity, whose rewards are not directly accessible to young women, but who nevertheless find themselves under pressure to succumb to the norms of femininity defined by its demands (Holland et al. 1998). Noteworthy here are again the studies by Thompson (1990) as well as by Tolman (1994) which showed that the girls whose sexual narratives did take into account their own pleasure and desire exercised more sexual autonomy in general including active preparedness for safer sex.

Young women, therefore, might be entrusted with the responsibility to manage relationships and sexual conduct but they are routinely denied the very knowledge and capacity upon which this implied agency and control could be built. The everyday uses

of language shape relations and young women's sexual experiences are defined at the level of language. Unfortunately, many adolescent girls lack language and vocabulary in which to describe or control the dynamics of sexual relations (Lees 1993). Research that explored how the issues of female sexual agency impact on the prevention of HIV, such as the comprehensive empirical study by Holland et al. (1998, 7), showed that "the language and the silences through which young women had learned about sexuality and sexual conduct put them at a distinct disadvantage when it came to exercising agency over or enjoying sexual encounters". This was problematic in many ways but was especially concerning because it meant that many young women were unable to suggest or initiate the use of a condom. In another study (Holland et al. 1996), the researchers showed that most unplanned teenage pregnancies, rather than being a result of the lack of the relevant knowledge about birth control or the availability of contraceptives, were a consequence of failing to use contraception. This was something enforced by the cultural context where women's insistence on the use of a condom is perceived as "embarrassing". Sue Lees (1993, 199) points out that young women are trapped within a contradiction, where carrying a condom is seen as responsible but at the same time breaches the notion of romantic spontaneity, implying premeditated sex. For a girl having sex is "something which 'happens' without previous intent unless of course the girl is a slag". It is worth noting here that the problem of communication around contraception seems to be enduring and not limited to the adolescent population. The study by Gavey and McPhillis (1999) who interviewed adult women in New Zealand showed that some of them were unable to initiate the use of a condom despite their earlier intentions not to have intercourse without one and having condoms in their possession. As Holland and colleagues point out:

> From a feminist perspective, using or not using a condom is not a simple, practical question about dealing rationally with risk, it is the outcome of

> negotiation between potentially unequal partners. Sexual encounters are sites of struggle between the exercise and acceptance of male power and male definitions of sexuality, and women's ambivalence and resistance. (Holland et al. 1996, 8)

Maturing sexually within the powerful influence of the coital imperative means that adolescent men learn to measure their sexual agency by the yardstick of their partners' acquiescence to sexual intercourse (Holland et al. 1998, 58). Even school sex education materials privilege hetero-normative and coital imperative scripts. Holland and colleagues talk about the gendering of sexual knowledge, which for young women means education by omission rather than inclusion and "diagrams in biology textbooks which show the vagina but not the clitoris". Laura Carpenter (1998) similarly notes that the sex education materials depict sex as an either/or decision about penetrative sex rather than as a continuum of possible activities. Some public health campaigns have been advocating safe sex as non-penetrative sex; however, there is little evidence that the sexual practices of young heterosexuals are any less focused on penetration (Lees 1993, 192). The dominant definition of safer heterosex continues to focus on how to prevent transmission during vaginal intercourse through the use of a condom, "failing to consider the many other kinds of risk specific to women's experience of sexual relationships" (Potts 2002, 42).

Sue Lees (1993, 306) observes that the formulations of masculinity as constituted in opposition to everything feminine and involving a denial of dependence are "endemic to the processes of thought and educational values that inform our educational institutions". She argues that dominant discourses of masculinity encourage boys to pressure girls into sex, which means the rejection of reciprocity and the denial of young women's subjectivity. The pressures vary from mild insistence and coercion to more overt threats and physical violence. This could be presented as a continuum of violence between everyday sexual harassment and sexual abuse, where one behaviour

shades into another and most of these conducts are not defined as crimes (Kelly 1988; cited in Lees 1993). Mark Limmer (2009, 14) who – more recently – carried out research with young men in Rochdale, Britain, notes that for the participants in his research, "sexualised masculinity meant . . . being seen as sexually skilled and voracious and maintaining superiority over young women". The young men's sexuality was constructed without taking their female peers' subjectivity into consideration. They relied on parents, peers and pornography for sexual education but were not aware of the exploitative or gender subordination dimensions of pornography.

Jane Ussher (1997) observed, however, that female sexual expression gains legitimacy within the context of a long-lasting, monogamous and essentially heterosexual relationship. The ideas of sex, love and romance are closely interwoven within public discourses of female sexuality and echo the familiar have/hold discourse: women ultimately need and desire relationships. Sharon Thompson illustrates this:

> Girls receive encouragement to fuse sex and love from countless cues, experiences, responses, and stories that construct femininity – from the tales of Beauty taming Beast and Cinderella bringing her prince to his knees to a daughter's hope for a father's recognition. (Thompson 1995, 44)

Indeed, Bollerud, Christopherson and Frank (1990) showed that young women made sexual choices based on the notions of attachment, interdependence and connectedness in the relationship.

The practices of framing female sexuality in terms of risk and romantic expectations have a powerful, and often negative, impact on the sexual experiences of adolescent women. Feminist researchers found that young girls' early sexual experiences were often disappointing and boring (Thompson 1990) because they did not match up the romantic fantasies of sexual fulfilment perpetuated in popular culture (Ussher 1997). Sharon Thompson (1995, 284) noted further that "In general, the more a

teenage girl viewed the elements of sex, reproduction, and love as fused and expected them to generate the central meaning of her life, the less likely she was to use protection or contraception." The already quoted study by Holland and colleagues (1998) revealed that ideologies of romance and love, which frame the objective of femininity as fulfilled in a long-lasting and monogamous relationship, mean that young women have an emotional investment in seeing their partners as trustworthy and long-term, complicating the management of sexual safety further. Many studies (Bollerud, Christopherson, and Frank 1990; Fine 1988; Tolman 1994; Thompson 1990, 1995) showed that sex education curricula by not acknowledging adolescent women's sexual desire as a legitimate entity that should not be entangled with the concerns of romance and relationships, may be ineffective or even harmful to young women.

Biological Determinism, Commercial Imperative and Self-help

> Imagine how you would feel if playing gin rummy, and playing it well, were considered a major component of happiness and a major sign of maturity, but no one told you how to play, you never saw any one else play, and everything you ever read implied that normal and healthy people just somehow "know" how to play and really enjoy playing the very first time they try! (Tiefer 1995, 11–12)

The above analogy is used by Leonore Tiefer in her book entitled *Sex is Not a Natural Act* to illustrate the relationship of a modern human with sex. As mentioned previously, Foucault (1978) examined the notion that – for a long time – sexuality not only has been a central political and moral concern but has also occupied a privileged position within human experience. After Foucault, Tiefer (1995, 11) contends that the eruption of a public discourse about sex represents "less eternal inquisitiveness than a modern epidemic of insecurity and worry generated by a new social construction". In other words, all the talk about sex does not generate true knowledge, understanding or confidence, but anxiety. Foucault maintained also that the knowledge about sex is

produced through the incitement to share problems and reveal the true self within the spectacle of confession. He believed however, that the truth does not "set one free" but through the act of confession the knowing subject becomes implicated in a complex relationship of power.

Tiefer (1995) further argues that the norms for sexual activity of the contemporary West were not formulated in the context of an open discussion but originate from religious discourses of morality, later phased out by science-based medical discourses of normalcy and deviance. Subjected to the rigours of clinical diagnosis, sexuality became problematic. Margaret Jackson (1987) in a historical account of sexology notes that it was the inter-war period that witnessed the birth of the modern sex manual. Earlier, sexual knowledge was mostly restricted to the specialists of a specific status and profession: scientists, researchers, doctors or lawyers. However, as laypersons were deemed to be in urgent need of sexual enlightenment, sex experts were recruited "with the status and credentials to allow them to translate abstract theories into concrete and practical advice which 'ordinary' people could follow" (59). This intervention of science and medicine into the sphere of sexual relations was an extension of the earlier process of medicalisation of reproduction and motherhood, which took place by the early twentieth century.

According to Wendy Simonds, the author of *Self-help Culture: Reading Between the Lines* (1992), one of the central tenets of self-help literature is the ethos of individualism that delivers an abundance of self-directed quick fixes deflecting attention away from the problems of the public sphere which cause people to need help in the first place. Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English (1979, 243) provide a powerful critical overview of 150 years of advice for women from experts, such as gynaecologists and psychoanalysts and the role of these professionals in what they define as the "sexual marketplace" of commercial capitalism. Ehrenreich and English observe how in the

emphasis on autonomy and opportunity and in offering techniques to build confidence and self-reliance, the "marketplace psychology" of self-help literature superficially resembles "the old rationalist feminism" (289). But this ideology of individualism "holds each person wholly responsible for her own condition, from the welfare mother to the million-dollar-a-year TV star" (290). The socio-political ramifications of individual existence remain beyond the scope of interest. Within this "commercial spirit of intimate life", as defined by Arlie Russell Hochschild (1994, 1), traditional sources of emotional support, such as parents, grandparents or ministers, priests and rabbis, have been replaced by professional therapists, television talk show hosts, magazine agony aunts and advice book authors. They legitimise their skill and knowledge with the testimonials of gratified customers or the use of anecdotal evidence bolstered by frequent appeals to nature, biology and sex difference (Potts 1998). They provide us with real-life stories and case studies that are either exemplary or cautionary (Hochschild 1994). "Stories contain magnified moments, episodes of heightened importance, either epiphanies, moments of intense glee or unusual insight, or moments in which things go intensely but meaningfully wrong" (4).

Leonore Tiefer (2004) identifies another, more pernicious problem with the sex advice culture. According to her, the sex advice framework has evolved within an overwhelmingly patriarchal context where biological accounts of sexual difference have been a major generative influence. Tiefer observes that, despite the apparent, post-feminist equality, biological variables are still being used to explain the inferior social status of women, and concludes that the popular scientific discourse on sex differences is alive and well. This is "because the message that sex differences 'are biological' keeps getting repacked in whatever biology is popular at the moment – brain anatomy, evolutionary theory, hormones, brain chemistry or gene effects" (437). As new technologies become available, new ways in which women and men differ are

unravelled, fuelling the mass media's insatiable lust for sensation. Recently, another powerful agent for the medicalisation of sexuality and sexual problems entered the scene introduced by the pharmaceutical industry. Since Viagra, the erection-enhancing drug, became available "media and popular culture were captured by an uncontested mechanical narrative of men's sexual satisfaction" (439). As discourses of biological determinism are appropriated by consumer capitalism, sexual knowledge becomes a commodity and a potentially lucrative selling point. And alas, as academic and sexual educator Petra Boynton (2002, 51) points out, accurate but mundane information based on sound evidence that could improve people's lives and prevent problems hardly "gets top billing".

As mentioned earlier, the discourses of sexual expertise often rely on the perpetuation and naturalisation of gender polarisation that is apparently manifest within different aspects of heterosexual relationships. Here the audience is positioned as naive, unknowing and needing to know (Farvid and Braun 2006). The problem of trying to unravel the "mysterious workings" of the "opposite sex" is routinely a topic of advice devoted to relationships (Farvid and Braun 2006, 303). One of the most widely published and read sexual and relationships self-help categories belongs to John Gray's popular series whose groundwork was published in 1992 and entitled *Men Are From Mars, Women Are from Venus*. The main tenets of the publication posit that men and women occupy separate universes so the harmony between them is conditional on the understanding and acceptance of these fundamental differences.

Annie Potts (1998) carried out a comprehensive, feminist informed analysis of the *Mars and Venus in the Bedroom: A Guide to Lasting Romance and Passion* (1995) – a very marketable addition to the series that is devoted specifically to the issues of sex. The rhetoric of the familiar coital imperative prevails within Gray's framework. Here, sex is compulsory and without it, as Potts puts it, one is "deficient in some sense; in-

complete, un-healthy" (156). However, not any type of sex should suffice; the completeness and wholeness is achieved through coitus: the union between a man and a woman that connects them with their core selves. "When a man is aroused, he rediscovers the love hidden in his heart. Through sex, a man can feel, and through feeling, he can come back to his soul again". "Great sex is soothing to a woman and helps keep her in touch with her feminine side" (Gray 1995; quoted in Potts 1998, 157 and 158). Paradoxically, although Gray constructs men's sexual fulfilment as only truly achieved in the presence of their partners' sexual satisfaction, he also maintains that men's physiological and psychological disposition means that they have to have sex always when they "need" to, lest the love for their partners will suffer. Therefore, women should make themselves available for men for frequent "quickies" even when they themselves do not have desire for sex. Women, then, once again become responsible for the maintenance of their partners' wellbeing. Indeed, while Gray's guides are apparently directed to both women and men, the author himself revealed that they are more likely to be read by women (Potts 1998, 154).

Mary Crawford and Jeanne Marecek (1989) argue that popular self-help texts are positioned within something that they termed as the "women-as-problem" framework. Judith Worell (1988, 477), who analysed the depiction of women in self-help materials of the 1980s, found that their messages are often misogynistic and constructed around three prevailing themes: women are "ignorant", because they do not know what they want; they are "incompetent" and lacking the skills to relate in close relationships; and "women and men are 'intimate strangers' with distinct and polarized styles of relating". Potts (1998) points to a paradox within this ideology, commenting that although gender differences between women and men are seen as biological, natural, intractable, and in fact healthy, the manuals prescribe strategies for how to change, manage and enact them. The demands of hegemonic masculinity invariably

require that it is up to women to change themselves in order to be more natural. Although the overt messages of the self-help texts for women are of inevitable sex differences, their covert message is one of subordination (Crawford 2004; Potts 1998). At times, they become deeply pernicious and even the most damaging practises, such as domestic violence, may be traced to women's own "wrong" behaviours and their inability to apply the right "rules" within their relationships, contradicting the advice of anti-domestic violence campaigns working to promote strategies to escape a violent partner (Boynton 2003).

Self-help: Reader Ethnographies

Studies that engaged with women as readers of self-help revealed a complex picture showing diversity within the reading practices and the nature of the appeal of self help materials to women. For example, Caroline Dryden (1999, 150) who interrogated the appeal of the "Mars and Venus" framework of self-help argues that, within the context of "post-feminism", the notion of gender oppression within heterosexual relationship is very difficult for women to discuss. However, the framing of the problem in terms of "innocent" linguistic misunderstandings between Martians and Venusians "has an optimistic and non-confrontational feel to it". Similarly, Deborah Cameron (2007) claims that the explanation lies in the fact that the Mars and Venus myth makes women feel good about themselves. They are portrayed as sympathetic and good at communicating, while men on the other hand are autistic and inarticulate Neanderthals.

Other studies into self-help reading practices revealed a complexity of the reasons why women turn to sex and relationship advice books. In a comprehensive, USA based study that explored self-help reading practices, Wendy Simonds (1992) showed that some women turned to self-help texts to solve concrete problems and seek

some specific information for personal reasons. This included reading to find advice on how to develop or transform certain features of character or behaviour or to generally attain self-understanding. Many women read self-help because they were dissatisfied with their relationships with men or simply felt that there was room for improvement. Generally, the women saw the self-help reading practices "as part of a skill women have in dealing with the emotional realm of life" (38) or something defined by Belenky et al. (1986, 39) as "connected knowingness" that aims to "embrace all the pieces of the self in some ultimate sense of the whole". Occasionally readers viewed women's self-help reading as something that reflected women's emotional deficiencies as compared with men. These included "a tendency to love too much", to "go by their emotions", "let everything get carried away" or doing "the same thing over and over and . . . get so tired of [one]selves" (Simonds 1992, 41). Ultimately however, reading self-help literature supported women in feeling a part of an invisible community of other women readers with the same concerns and problems. For many readers, the books provided a temporary respite from problems by providing a comforting comparison of the worst case scenario. "Buying self-help, whatever form of media it takes, is about alienation *and* hope" (226, emphasis in original) and as Mary Crawford puts it:

> may afford their female readers a discourse for articulating problems of inequality in relationships and for holding their partners accountable. In doing so, the readers may make visible some unexpected sites of contention and create interpretations that compete with the texts' own ideology. (Crawford 2004, 75)

Wendy Simonds (1992) concludes her study with a very compelling explanation of the appeal of self-help materials to women. She emphasises that women read self-help books because they are everywhere: self-help culture is our culture. Even women who do not read them have some idea about the stories they tell and are to some extent exposed to the ideologies purveyed by the authors. "We are infused with culture

because we live in it" (216). Ethnographic studies, therefore, provide not only a more in depth and real picture of the complex relationship between the readers and the texts but also highlight how the implied ideological loading of the text might be resisted.

Indeed, in an ongoing debate about what is the best way of studying and understanding the relationship of the media and the media consumers, the following considerations and concerns have been highlighted:

> Reader ethnographies represent one possible way of moving away from the overwhelming emphasis on the texts and their various readings. This focus, it was hoped, would contribute an additional level of analysis in the otherwise assumed cycle of production and consumption of meaning. (McRobbie 1996, 176)

> The worry and concern in older feminist criticism leads to a highly unequal relationship between the feminist author and "ordinary women". The feminist media critic is prophet and exorcist, even while being, as many claim, an "ordinary woman" too. Feminists using modernity discourse speak on behalf of others who are, implicitly, thought to be unable to see for themselves how bad such media texts as women's magazines are. They need to be enlightened; they need good feminist texts in order to be saved from their false consciousness. (Hermes 1995, 1)

Similarly, Elizabeth Frazer (1987) in a study that involved young audiences warns against the rigid understandings of the relationship between "tightly-specified" ideology, media texts as the implied bearers of such ideology, and their effects on the readers. Frazer argues that text analysis only studies tend to construct a rigid relationship between a reader and text, where the text's ideological meaning accounts for the reader's attitudes and behaviours. This is a largely passive relationship, where – as Dawn Currie (1999, 89) framed it – "the readers are constructed through ideology critique" or "read off the text".

Women's Magazines and Their Readers

Studies that interrogated women's magazines in terms of their linguistic and discursive features revealed that their content is highly contradictory. For example, Angela McRobbie (1996) in a study that explored the magazine *More!* argues that magazines and their contents are discursively constructed through the process of mediation and competition between different cultural values. They are the venues for intersecting but also conflicting interests of publishers, advertisers and design professionals. Similarly, Mary Talbot (1998, 177) notes that "[m]agazines are not homogeneous, and they never have been. Diversity is a key characteristic. They draw on a wide range of genres and discourses, addressing their readers in many different voices".

Janice Windship (1987) in her groundbreaking critique of women's magazines admits that she is a "closed reader" but also writes about one of the magazines that she analysed, *Cosmopolitan*, "My own view is that it is cutting off our nose to spite our face to outlaw wholesale what *Cosmo* stands for, to say nothing of manifesting the worst aspects of a political 'holier than thou' moralism" (115). Jane Ussher (1997) in the book entitled *Fantasies of Femininity: Reframing the Boundaries of Sex* quotes audience studies that revealed further contradictions in how women engaged with magazines. On the one hand, the readers were magazines' greatest critics, pointing out that they made them feel bad or angry because of the focus on beauty and being slim; or because they could not afford the clothes; or were made more aware of not being in a relationship. At the same time, the readers claimed that they enjoyed reading magazines as a treat because they were amusing and constituted a form of escapism; they helped them to feel not alone; and they provided useful tips and informative content. Ussher therefore suggests that there is no single correct interpretation regarding magazines

reading practices. She also notes that women might distance themselves from magazines but this does not mean that they relinquish the pleasures that could be gained from "doing femininity".

And pleasure is something that many feminist commentators (Douglas 1995; McRobbie 1996; Winship 1987) name as an important part of the appeal of magazines to women. This appeal is both visual and emotional. It is the feel of their glossy pages, the refined, exquisite look of their images or the seemingly positive, exhilarating quality of the reality they present. Susan Douglas (1995, 251) illustrates this as, "I don't read *Vogue* or *Glamour*; if you'll pardon the masculine metaphor, I enter them. I escape into them, into a world where I have nothing more stressful to do than smooth on some skin cream, polish my toenails, and lie on the beach".

Joke Hermes (1995) showed that magazines appeal to women not only because they offer "easy" relaxation and, due to their format, are easy to pick up and put down again but also because they constitute a source of practical knowledge and useful everyday tips. The readers in Hermes' study turned to magazines in order to learn about other people's emotions and problems, which in turn helped them reflect on their own lives and seek consolation for their own worries. Similarly, Brita Ytre-Arne (2011) who conducted a study into women's magazines and their readers in Norway revealed that some of recurring themes around magazines' appeal were "relaxation, reward and ritual" as well as "reflection, empathy and identification". Ytre-Arne notes that the "participants expressed a broad interest in reading about other people's lives, and interpreted these stories in relation to their own experiences" (219).

Sexual Learning?: Teenage Magazines

A large research project conducted in schools in England that explored young people's views on sex education (Measor, Tiffin, and Miller 2000; 2004) showed that –

beside friends and members of the family – teenage magazines such as *Just Seventeen* constitute for young women a main source of sex and sexuality education. Indeed, the research that will be discussed in this section indicates that contemporary popular media – including teenage and women's magazines – play an important role in the formulation, (re)production and contestation of the discourses of female sexuality discussed in previous sections.

Ethnographic readership studies which involved young female audience (such as by Currie 2001; Kehily 1999; McClengehan 2003) showed that the advice pages are the favourite and most popular sections of teenage magazines, which young readers often read first. Furthermore, commercial materials designed to advise about sexual behaviours and practices, such as advice pages in women's magazines, as well as having considerable use as a resource for sexual learning and the construction of sexual identities (Currie 1999; Kehily 1999), exert an impact on issues of sexual health and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases (Few 1997). In a relative absence of sex education where problems can be discussed freely and in societies that by and large pay scant attention to perspectives of young people, advice pages provide a site where concerns voiced by young women can be taken seriously (Jackson, 2005). As Jane Ussher (1997, 31) sums it, "The agony aunt is almost like a 'friend' – she has been through all these teenage traumas herself and is always sympathetic, never judgmental (unlike parents, who 'never understand')". Angela McRobbie (1991, 161) argues that magazines' sexual advice pages are a platform for the "definition, navigation and regulation of young women's sexual expectations". Although the advice is directed at an individual, it is tailored to enable young women to make sense of their own attitudes and experiences around sexuality. Here, young readers learn about the important landmarks of adolescence and how to reach the transformation from girls into women within the requirements of appropriate cultural norms. McRobbie (1996) believes that

the insistence of magazines like *More!* – which otherwise could be seen as innocent girls' zones – on the bold discussion of controversial issues around sex contributes to the breaking down of constraints of normative femininity and blurring the line between "good and bad girls". McRobbie argues that the discourses that can potentially challenge and contradict the concerns of the magazines and their limited normative ideals of girlhood exist outside in institutional sites such as work, education or family.

Frazer (1987) in her ethnographic research with girls who read teen magazine *Jackie,* revealed that the young readers did not match the characteristics of the hypothetical reader constructed by textual critique studies. Frazer interviewed young women from a variety of British social backgrounds about their perceptions of the photo story as well as the "problem" pages in the magazine. She revealed that the majority of young women took "a critical stand vis-à-vis texts" (407). They not only distanced themselves from the characters in the photo story acknowledging them as fully fictional, but they were also were fully aware of the double standards and gender stereotypes visible in the portrayals. Furthermore, the girls found the problem pages "stupid" and not "real", and concluded that "the answers were pathetic and not helpful at all" (419).

Another interview study by Kehily (1999) similarly revealed that young readers of magazine advice pages represented an active and critical audience capable of informed reflection on the content and credibility of the material. Kehily conducted her study in a British school setting and observed that the reading of magazines was a school based activity, which constituted a distraction from the routine of the school life and a resource for a collective experience of female friendship and an exchange of humour. The readers were predominantly interested in the clues and information as contained within the problem sections rather than corresponding advice, and, as well as regarding the texts as a useful source of information about sexual matters that young girls need to know about, simultaneously viewed them as a "laugh" and "not to be taken

seriously" (72). The advice pages elicited a wide range of contradictory responses, from laughter and enjoyment through empathy to disbelief and mockery. Some readers raised the question of distrust and the possible deception of the magazine editors, suggesting that the problems in the advice pages were sometimes "made up" and "[didn't] sound real" (74). Notably also, girls in the study actively repudiated the up-front and "over the top" sexual excess represented by *More!* magazine and so visible across many other titles aimed at a more mature audience.

Dawn Currie (2001, 261) – in a study carried out in Canada – used an approach that combined the analysis of girls' accounts of magazine reading in conjunction with textual analysis in order to shed more light on the appeal of magazines and the role of "commercial culture in the sociohistorical construction of the knowing subject". Like Kehily (1999), Currie found that young women were involved in a collective discussion of advice pages and the participation in reading constituted belonging to both a real and a discursive community of teenage girls. However, Currie noted that collective readings did not mean that textual constructions were rejected when they contradicted real experiences. Currie emphasised that magazines are actively involved in the definition of typical and desirable versions of femininity and that the repudiation of textual constructions in favour of lived knowledge might require placing oneself outside the consensual normalcy. Girls in the Currie's study found a sense of security and comfort in identifying with the magazines' constructions. Many of the participants' accounts not only compared texts with lived experiences but also blurred the boundaries between them. "The result is a construction of a speaking subject who 'names' her experiences, and formulates her understandings, from inside them" (266). Currie pointed out that the specificity of advice format affords the intersection of the individual with the social: a simultaneous sense of intimacy and community. A personal problem of not having a boyfriend becomes a social aspect of natural heterosexual relations. However, Currie

noted that the text conveyed contradictory messages about heterosexual romance, where having no boyfriend was treated in such a way as to invite personal identification, while failing to use contraception and unprotected intercourse were outside the boundaries of normal behaviour. Being without a boyfriend was equated to being alone and acknowledged as a potentially anxiety provoking state; however, similar concern and acknowledgement was completely absent from the treatment of the topic of unwanted pregnancy. Currie summed up her findings, "In this study, the effect of magazine reading is to construct a social subjectivity that resonates with the autonomous individual mandated by patriarchal culture" (278).

Conclusion

Despite the discourses promoting women's sexual liberation, female sexuality and female sexual needs continue to be defined and restricted by the male dominated, phallocentric scripts that exclude other sexual activities that are perhaps safer and more pleasurable for women. While young men are commonly aware of their sexual entitlements and needs, young women may often participate in sexual intercourse for reasons other then pleasure and desire. In a relative absence of comprehensive sex education, commercial materials designed to advise about sexual behaviours and practices such as advice pages in women's magazines have considerable use as a resource for sexual learning. My research inquiry will explore popular media texts as potential sites where the formulation, (re)production and contestation of discourses of female sexuality discussed in the previous paragraphs take place. The focus of my work will be on Poland and the next chapter will introduce this setting, looking specifically into the role and status of women in Poland before and after the political transformations of 1989.

Chapter Three

Women in Poland Before and After the Transition

> Something has happened to Polish women. Once upon a time they were equal partners, as prevalent in the workplace (if not the management) as men. Then communism collapsed – and along with it many of the gender equality measures it pretended to champion. So that now, it is impossible to ignore the workplace inequalities that have proliferated. The difference in salaries between men and women is 25%-35%. (*The Guardian*, Williams 2011, 26)

This chapter will explore the recent political and historical transitions in Poland focussing specifically on their effects on the lives of women. It is a historical and cultural overview that is concerned with the role and status of women in Poland today and during the socialist years. In this chapter, I explore a wide array of issues such as the notion of gender egalitarianism, the influence of Catholic tradition on reproductive laws and gender expectations, as well as the new media landscape in Poland. I will also examine how the narratives of global neo-liberalism that permeate the country's cultural discourse play an important role in the formulation of new models of femininity and the definitions of womanhood in present-day Poland.

Polish Tradition of Gender Egalitarianism

In a recurrent private debate that revolves around the topic of "comparing countries and traditions", one of my Polish friends addressing her French husband once remarked that the women in France did not score so well in terms of their rights because as late as the 1960s they were not allowed to open bank accounts without the permission of their husbands. Trying to explore this issue further, I found an interview with Barbara Labuda, a Polish feminist who spent some time in France. Labuda's words echo my friend's sentiment:

> Very often, women had to get approval from a husband or a father. . . or a father to do something independently. It's simply incredible but that's how it was. It was incredible for Polish women, because it wasn't like that in Poland. But, on the other hand, there weren't that many banks in Poland, so one couldn't really have that many bank accounts anyway, but this was for other reasons; it was simply a poor country, so bank accounts would immediately look suspicious. (Labuda 2003, 10)

Labuda goes on to describe how some aspects of life in France where "shocking" to her because in Poland "norms were different" and "more egalitarian". In France, she "simply never saw . . . almost nowhere, except in leftist circles . . . women not removed, not pushed to the sidelines, into this drawing room, or another room, or the kitchen" (10). While men talked about politics and "about huge strategy goals for their country", women "chatted about crocheting and mostly exchanged food recipes". Labuda notes that in her home it was her husband who cooked because she did not have a "culinary imagination". Another account of lived experiences of the active participation of women in what is normally considered male dominated areas is provided by Maya Mortensen who grew up during socialism in Poland:

> As far as education is concerned it was absolutely equal, to the extent that at the technical universities – the very high-standard engineering universities – I think 30% of students were women. (quoted in Williams 2011, 26)

Zoe Williams who cited Mortensen provides a clarification for Mortensen's words stating that:

> (this was in the 1960s – engineering courses at Imperial College London still have a male to female ratio of 5:1 today). . . . To this day women are nothing like as under-represented in the sciences as they are in the UK, and not just in the "soft" sciences either. (Williams 2011, 26)

Although these examples are anecdotal, they illustrate the ways that the specific Polish historical context had a bearing on the attitudes and expectations of Polish

women. In socialist Poland, both men and women were assumed to equally participate in the process of the development of the socialist reality. All Eastern European countries introduced laws giving women equal property rights, equal pay and job opportunity, as well as access to free health care and easy divorce (Rohrlich 1979). Sexual equality was, in principle, inherent to the Marxist philosophy. Notably, reproductive rights were liberalised in the Soviet Union following the death of Stalin in 1955 and shortly after in other socialist countries including Poland. Abortion was made available on request and as a result of the unavailability and mistrust of contraceptives, became a relatively common method of birth control in Poland (Stenvoll 2006).

Heinen and Wator (2006, 192) point out that in the years after the Second World War, Poland adopted "a rather progressive constitution from a gender point of view" that proclaimed equality between women and men in all spheres of society. During the period of the post-war rebuilding and redevelopment there was a shortage of male workers and, in contrast to what was taking place in most western countries, women were recruited to replace them, drawing on the principle that women's employment would serve as a lever for their emancipation. To support women in reconciling work with their maternal duties, the government constructed a comprehensive network of support, including nurseries, kindergartens, after-school clubs, centres of culture and sport clubs. "By the mid-1970s, nearly half the Polish work force was made up of women" (Curtis 1994, 83–84).

Education

Education has traditionally been a principal value in the national culture of Poland and educational opportunities for women were increasingly promoted during the socialist era. Even before socialism in 1921, Poland could boast that 26 percent of the county's medical students, 65 percent of philosophy students and 11 percent of law

students were women (Rohrlich 1979, 491). In the seventies, a sixfold increase in the number of younger women attaining secondary education was recorded and meant that women who completed this level of education constituted 54 per cent (Sokołowska 1977, 359). "On a purely statistical basis, Poland, like the rest of the Soviet alliance in Eastern Europe, offered women more opportunities for higher education and employment than did most Western European countries. Between 1975 and 1983, the total number of women with a higher education doubled, to 681,000 graduates" (Curtis 1994, 84). By 1984, women in Poland constituted 50.8 percent of students in higher education (in the Soviet Union this statistic was even higher, 56 percent in 1981, Bystydzienski 1989, 670). Notably, women exceeded men in higher education in Poland eight years ahead of the United Kingdom (Thompson and Bekhradnia 2009).

Work

Throughout the socialist years, female labour participation was very high. According to data recorded in 1975 and 1985 respectively, only five percent of working-age women in Poland were employed part-time and women constituted 44 percent of the entire labour force (Bystydzienski 1989, 670–672). "Many professions, such as architecture, engineering, and university teaching, employed a considerably higher percentage of women in Poland than in the West, and over 60 percent of medical students in 1980 were women. In many households in the 1980s, women earned more than their husbands" (Curtis 1994, 84). Magdalena Sokołowska, whose study was published in 1977, notes that the medical profession was universally regarded in Poland as a female profession. Beulah Rohrlich (1979, 493) also points out that "The predominance of women physicians, dentists, and pharmacists is a phenomenon distinct to Eastern European countries. In each profession, women have comprised more than 50 percent of the members since 1968, and have reached over 80 percent in dentistry".

The notion of labour and economic gender equality was visible across the Polish cultural and political landscape of the time and could be illustrated by the Polish socialist slogan "Women as tractor drivers". In a popular television comedy series entitled *Czterdziestolatek* (A Man Who Turned Forty) the notion is epitomised by the satirical character of "a working woman" who in each episode appears in a new outfit or uniform, taking up yet another occupation, greeting the main protagonists with an exclamation "I am a working woman. I am not afraid of any kind of work".

Gender equality?

All the above claims notwithstanding, many commentators who analysed the situation of women in Eastern Europe during socialism question the apparent gender equality and point to the many contradictions, emphasising that, within still traditionally patriarchal societies, there was no counter equality for men's involvement in the domestic domain. Women alongside their engagement within the labour force retained the responsibility for the majority of domestic duties (LaFont 2001), which meant that they often had the equivalent of two full-time jobs (Curtis 1994, 85). By providing the widely available support for working mothers, the state simply fulfilled its goal of high female labour whilst retaining equally high fertility rates (Glass and Fodor 2007).

Jacqueline Heinen and Monika Wator (2006) who explored childcare policies in Poland critique the notion of universally and reliably available state support and argue that although in the early post-war period the number of childcare centres tripled, this number hardly grew by the early 1960s when the drastic cuts in light industry created female unemployment and the priorities assigned to women were inverted. During that time, the mass media messages were re-oriented to encourage women to return to the home. Heinen and Wator observe that "[w]omen were no longer [as in the first phase of the post-war communist Poland] regarded as 'worker-mothers' but as 'mother-workers',

or just simply mothers" (192). Notably, the researchers observe that before, during and after the system transition in 1989 childcare in Poland continued to be "a women's business".

Similarly, according to Rohrlich (1979) the enthusiasm about the high participation of women within the medical and dental profession during the socialist era wanes in view of the fact that female professionals were more likely to serve in public clinics than in research institutes and were anaesthesiologists rather than surgeons or professors who taught surgery. This general tendency within the labour force revealed "women concentrated in the low status, low paying jobs and being passed over for promotions" (LeFont 2001, 205). Curtis (1994, 84) also notes that during the 1980s, very few women occupied top positions in the PZPR (Polish United Workers' Party) and argue that "[s]ome experts assert that the male power structure protects its dominance by limiting the opportunities for the advancement of Polish women to those that filled an existing need in the male-dominated society".

Motherhood

Despite the emphasis on women's participation in the labour force, during the socialist era Polish society continued to give high priority to women's role within the family and in raising children (Curtis 1994). "During the 1980s, both the state (by adjusting school schedules and providing nurseries and substantial paid maternity leave) and the church (by its influential emphasis on the sanctity of the family) successfully promoted the traditional role of women in raising the next generation" (84). Here, to shed more light on the position of Polish women and their sexual relations with men during socialism it is important to look at the powerful legacy of Polish Marianism within the unique strain of Polish Catholicism (Porter 2005). Within this specific and almost folk tradition, Mary epitomises the foundations of national life: the family. She

is a selfless and asexual version of femininity, a long suffering, patient and emotional mother and a prototype for another enduring cultural model of *Matka Polka* (Polish Mother, Filipowicz 2002). *Matka Polka*, somewhat at odds with the earlier-described model of a working woman, represents the pillar of the hearth. She is an often-cited strong and thoroughly domesticated figure who, when men were gone to fight Poland's many historical battles, fulfilled the duty of keeping the nation alive. As Cusack (2000, 545) points out, "Women's and men's relations to the modern nation thus have different trajectories: while women are taken to represent the nation's traditional face, men appropriate the future". The many portrayals of the contemporised version of *Matka Polka* as an exemplar of quintessential femininity are visible in Polish literature, art, film and television.

The powerful legacy of *Matka Polka* as a figure of inspiration for women in Poland has been explored by many scholars in Poland. A feminist film studies researcher, Ewa Mazierska (2002, 5) argues that the model of *Matka Polka* "supports the rule of patriarchy by expecting the woman to stand by her man (or the memory of him, if he died in battle) and by claiming that a woman's place at home determines her position in society". Another Polish feminist theorist, Elżbieta Adamiak (1999, 113), points out that the Polish Church is a mainstay of the old order: an institution frequented mostly by women but governed by men. In this powerful patriarchal context, the cult of Mary has a paralysing and repressive impact on women because "who can face up to the ideal of mother-virgin". A prominent Polish feminist scholar, Agnieszka Graff (2008, 46), argues however, that as well as supporting feminine identity, the central role of the Virgin Mary in Polish Catholicism can also contribute to the forging of bonds amongst women. Graff quotes Polish ethnographic studies, which suggest that Polish Catholic women do not attach much significance to the virginity of Mary (Świstow 2006) and

that there exist some subversive, if not feminist, dimension to the modern Polish version of religious worship (Bierca 2006).

Women's Press During the Socialist Era

Within the context of relatively limited availability of research into women's magazines in Poland, especially the magazines that were printed during the socialist era, a comprehensive historical overview of the Polish press for women is presented by Dorota Zaworska-Nikoniuk (2008). Zaworska-Nikoniuk notes that, for example, in the forties, the familiar "working woman" ideal who strived to achieve the government-set socialist plan objectives through work, occupational training and education prevailed in the magazines. However, in 1956 with the worsening of the situation within the labour market and the lack of positions for men, the press embarked on the popularisation of marriage and motherhood. The ability to combine harmoniously love and planned parenthood alongside a professional career was emphasised. The ideal family was based on partnership, with men participating in the household duties and women remaining economically and morally independent from their male partners. Zaworska-Nikoniuk (2008, 127) notes that during the 1960s the magazine *Przyjaciółka* (Girlfriend) promoted gender equality based on the ideals of liberal feminism, which reflected the influences that at that time were reaching Poland from Western Europe. However, these ideals often did not reflect the opinions and attitudes of the magazine readers who, as indicated by the readers' letters, applied a degree of practical scepticism towards the liberal messages promoted by this medium.

The magazine *Przyjaciółka* deserves individual attention. Founded in 1948 and still existing today, it is considered "a cultural mainstay" (Lanoux 2006) or even "a legend of the Polish press" (Podgórska and Wilk 1998, 5). In a study of women's periodicals in Poland during and after socialism, Andrea Lanoux notes:

> Despite changes in its ideological bent and a gradual increase in its length from twelve to sixteen pages, the basic format and content of *Przyjaciłóka* remained surprisingly stable for forty years. . . . Standard contents included short stories, book reviews, recipes, domestic advice, sewing patterns, letters from readers, crossword puzzles, articles on contemporary culture, and want ads, with an emphasis on issues related to family. . . . Problems related to alcoholism, divorce, and child-rearing were regularly discussed, but . . . they were treated rather as individual concerns, and a woman whose husband drank or whose marriage had failed was responsible for creating harmony by heeding good advice. . . . Social and political events that did not fit this picture remained outside the magazine's pages: while the Solidarity movement was gaining momentum in 1980, the cover of *Przyjaciółka* featured two carefree teenage girls eating ice cream in the park. (Lanoux 2006, 130–131)

Polish Women Today

According to sociological studies conducted in the 1990s (quoted in Wóycicka and Dominiczak 2000, 1) Polish teenagers of both genders are practical and career oriented, and understand the reality of the new system and its competitive nature. Moreover, women in Poland are generally better educated than men with more young women completing secondary education – 499,625 female students as compared with 258,076 male students in the year 1997/98. Also more women, that is 56 percent of the overall number of students, are entering and completing university education (Wóycicka and Dominiczak 2000, 1–2). German magazine *Der Spiegel* provides a positive picture of the situation of women in the contemporary Poland:

> Statistically speaking, Polish women are among the most modern women in Europe. They are behind one in three new business startups, putting Poland ahead of many other European Union countries. They occupy more than a third of positions in middle management, a record which is only beaten by France, Latvia and Lithuania. And the Polish birth rate, long one of Europe's highest, is now one of its lowest, at 1.4 children per woman. "We are no longer willing to be tied down to the mother role," says Wieczorek (the editor-in-chief of *Wysokie Obcasy*, the popular women's weekly supplement to the major newspaper in Poland). (Puhl 2010)

Despite this, the considerable success of conservative ideology advocated by the Church and its political allies means that stereotypical beliefs about the roles of women in society prevail. Seventy percent of Poles feel that women can only achieve fulfilment as mothers and approximately 33 percent of the population is of the opinion that university education is more important for men than for women (Siemieńska 1998, 109). At the base of these attitudes is the view that girls and boys have different personalities, needs and values, and that social roles of women and men should reflect this (Firkowska-Mankiewicz 1995). Biological explanations harnessed to affirm the traditional gender roles constitute a powerful discourse that is not unique to Poland. What is surprising, however, is that the traditional or stereotyped views on the roles of women in society prevail in today's Poland despite the powerful ethos of educational and professional achievement for both genders.

The end of communism brought a new debate about the role of women in Polish society. Some saw this political transformation as "an appropriate moment for women to return full-time to the home after communism had forced them into the workforce and weakened the family" (Curtis 1994, 86). This tendency meant that "[t]he increased unemployment of the early 1990s generally affected more women than men [and] in 1992 forty women were jobless for every vacancy they were qualified to fill, while the ratio for men was fourteen to one" (85). Women with children age six or younger were particularly affected, with only 64 percent of women with young children continuing to work (Glass and Fodor 2007, 341). "A 1992 national study revealed discrimination against women in hiring practices and payment of unemployment benefits with no law prohibiting such sex discrimination" (Curtis 1994, 86). Similar tendencies reflected the power relations within the arena of politics and policy making. In 1989, women comprised twenty per cent of the members of the parliament but this number had fallen to twelve per cent by 1990 (Leven 1994, 38). This was paralleled by the removal of

women from other positions of local and national political power, including the Solidarity movement. Indeed, according to Glass and Fodor (2007), Solidarity's primary goal has been to protect the employment of male workers, often at the expense of women's employment.

Private Maternalism

A vital factor that had supported women's participation in the workforce was childcare provision which underwent a huge reform in the 1990s. The successive openly pro-Catholic Solidarity government introduced targeted welfare measures that aimed to restore the traditional roles of men as breadwinners and women as wives and mothers (Glass and Fodor 2007). By 1992, more than half the Polish day care centres had closed. The centres that remained open raised their prices sharply striving to become self-supporting (Curtis 1994, 86). The financial situation of many women does not permit them to withdraw from the job market (LeFont 2001). Indeed, women continue to constitute almost half of the workforce in the region, with women's share in the labour force oscillating between 45 and 50 per cent (UNIFEM 2006, 25). This means that in order to continue working, Polish women must make their own arrangements either within family or within privately provided childcare with the costs of the latter remaining prohibitive for most of them. Following the state's removal of subsidies for childcare, the average monthly cost of private childcare quadrupled, equalling over eighty percent of women's average monthly salaries (Leven 1994, 36). No support is provided for those who care for children under the age of three (Glass and Fodor 2007). Only two percent of children under this age are enrolled in nursery school and only about fifty percent of children above the age of three are cared for in public kindergartens (Heinen and Wator 2006, 201). Over the course of the decade from 1985 to 1995, the proportion of women who rely on family help (particularly grandmothers)

has increased from ten to nearly sixty percent (Simieńska 2002, 80). Glass and Fodor (2007, 325) define this phenomenon the "private maternalism", where the market and the family have become the primary institution of welfare provision.

According to LaFont (2001) the agenda promoting the inscription of women into their traditional homemaker roles is also linked to the need to increase birth rates in a situation where the fertility rate in Poland recorded in 2006 at 1.28 was among the lowest five in Europe (1.85 in the UK, Population Reference Bureau 2007) and is often articulated as a threat to national survival. Paradoxically, the explanation for such a low birth rate that is often given is the postponement of childbearing in a situation where the labour market is not conducive to female labour participation with high female unemployment and low job security (BBC 2006; Mishtal 2009). This could be contrasted with Poland during the socialist era where parental leave up to the third birthday of the child was accompanied by a job retention guarantee (Oláh and Fratczak 2004, 218).

Reproductive Rights

Another aspect that underwent a drastic transformation in post-socialist Poland is birth control legislation. The British researcher into the situation of women in Eastern Europe, Peggy Watson (1996), points out that in the majority of formerly socialist countries that went through the system change, abortion laws were the first issue discussed and regulated within the political agenda. Some commentators argue that debates about reproduction stand in as "coded arguments" through which political legitimacy and state morality is debated (Gal and Kligman 2000, 15). As Kramer (2009, 82) explains further, the discussion about abortion "serves as a substitute issue where wider concerns and anxieties around the proper ordering of the re/constructed postcommunist polity, (gendered) citizens and nation/state are played out, and where the

legitimacy of political authority is articulated and contested". In this context, "defending life" means "protecting the nation" and "protecting the (postcommunist) foetus becomes equated with establishing human rights purposefully denied or suppressed under socialism. Protecting the 'unborn life' is thus harnessed to the wider concern of re-instating rights and instituting accountable and representative democracy" (Kramer 2009, 94).

A force that has gained a significant political influence since 1989, the Solidarity movement, has supported a strong anti-abortion agenda endorsed by the Church. Indeed, in spring 1991, the newly elected president Lech Wałęsa disbanded the women's section of Solidarity because of its members' continued attempts to oppose the criminalisation of abortion (Graff 2003; Glass and Fodor 2007). Earlier in 1989, the Solidarity government of Tadeusz Mazowiecki drafted an act which made abortion illegal and advocated prison sentences of up to five years for women who underwent abortion and the doctors who performed them (Bystydzienski 2001, 506). The proposal was drafted in conjunction with the Polish Episcopate (Kramer 2009, 85). It was shelved in the light of massive public protest and substantial public debate (Fuszara 1991, 124).

From 1993, Poland continues to have the strictest abortion regulation in the area. The Law on Family Planning, the Protection of a Human Foetus and Conditions for Legal Abortion permits the procedure only when the circumstances suggest that it would save a woman's life or preserve her physical or mental health, when the prenatal tests reveal foetal impairment or when there is a suspicion that the pregnancy occurred as a result of a criminal act (Stenvoll 2006, 38). In 1996, which showed a swing back to the left on the election platform, the law that allowed abortion under a "socio-economic conditions" clause was passed (Kramer 2009, 86). Late in 1996 a group of senators took the liberalised law to the Constitutional Tribunal, which deemed that most

amendments were unconstitutional. This ruling was ratified in 1997 by the Sejm (the lower house of the Polish parliament) and the 1993 restrictive law was re-introduced. In practice, even in cases where abortion is legally permissible, it is routinely denied by doctors who apply the conscience clause.

Agnieszka Graff (2001) notes that within religion originated discourses of abortion in Poland, the foetus acquired the status of personhood, whereas the personhood of women is denied. Words such as “foetus” and “pregnancy” were replaced with “unborn children” and “the protection of the unborn”. “Abortion” became a “murder” and “a pregnant woman”, “a mother”. This is marked by the concerning disappearance of women’s rights from reproductive debates. As Kramer (2009, 83) puts it, “the impact of foetal citizenship is still greater than this, as it is predicated upon making women’s citizenship rights subsidiary to the rights of the foetus”.

According to *Federacja na Rzecz Kobiet i Planowania Rodziny* (Fedaration for Women and Family Planning 2011), in 2010, there were 641 legal abortions. However, Maria Pawłowska points out:

> Just to put this figure in context: Poland has 36 million citizens. Out of those over 11 million are women between the ages of 18 and 59. If these statistics were true, Poland would be an international phenomenon: the number of abortions officially conducted in Poland annually is less than a seventh of the number of abortions conducted in America daily! However, what the number really means is that there is a huge abortion underground. At a recent conference held in the Polish parliament, the number of illegal abortions conducted in Poland annually was judged to be at least 200,000 (and that’s after the exclusion of “abortion tourists” who are well-off enough to leave the country and have a safe, humane abortion in Germany or the UK). (Pawłowska 2011)

Recording a small number of abortions performed legally while disregarding a huge number of abortions performed illegally serves as a means to demonstrate that the existing law regulating abortion, which was introduced in 1993, is successful.

However, the existence of thriving illegal abortions services and abortion tourism are not the only reasons to curb the apparent optimism about the success of the statute.

In 2007, the story of a Polish woman, Alicja Tysiąc, whose eyesight was severely damaged after giving birth to her third child, was widely publicised (see BBC News website 2007). Alicja was refused an abortion despite warnings that having a baby could make her go blind. This is a severe case that demonstrates that even in legally permitted cases, some women have difficulties securing their rights to abortion, leading to the situation where abortion, while officially permitted in certain circumstances, has been "effectively delegalised" (Pawłowska 2011). Consequently, the restriction of access to abortion on medical grounds disproportionately affects the poorest women, as they are most likely to suffer health problems associated with pregnancy (Nowicka and Tajak 2000, 36). The price for the procedure performed illegally varies from 1,500 to 3,000 zlotych (around £300 – £600; Kozłowski 2009). Agnieszka Graff illustrates further how the restriction of reproductive freedom affects mostly the poorer women in Poland:

> Brutally speaking, Polish women of childbearing age are not divided into 'pro-life' or 'pro-choice' but separated by the size of their pocketbooks. 'You have cash – writes Kinga Dunin [another Polish feminist commentator] – you are an autonomous subject; no cash, you become an object. (Graff 2001, 124)

At the time of writing, in June 2011, Polish lawmakers in the Sejm voted in favour of sending to the committee stage a draft bill that would ban abortion outright. At the same time, many young Polish people gathered outside the Sejm building in protest entitled "Life for foetuses, death to mothers". The ironic slogans on the banners read, "Don't deprive rapists of their right to parenthood" and "We want to die for our foetuses". Graff commented on the issue in the major newspaper of Poland, *Gazeta Wyborcza*:

> The rule according to which the life of a woman is valued on the same scale as the life of a foetus is very grandiose but it has also real consequences. A doctor presented with this dramatic choice will opt for saving the foetus, just in case and because he would not like to fall foul of the "defenders of life". Anyway, today it already happens frequently, a large percentage of women who are eligible according to the present law to abortion in a public hospital on the grounds of ill health in practice are not able to gain a legal abortion. They use the abortion underground or (as it was in the case of Alicja Tysiąc) give birth and suffer enormous health costs. (Graff 2011, 22)

Graff argues also that by demanding the preservation of a pregnancy that might have been a result of rape or that might be detrimental to the woman's health the state imposes a form of sainthood on women. This sainthood is, as some people in Poland believe, something that all Polish citizens and Poland as a country should aspire to, following the words of John Paul II "Nobody has to be a saint but one should aspire to sainthood." However, as Graff (2011, 22) points out, "Defending the lives of the unborn is a much more pleasurable pursuit. Firstly, one does not have to look after them. Secondly, each Catholic fundamentalist knows that you score more points for doing it." Indeed, mainstream discourses around abortion often revolve around the issues of morality and the philosophical dilemmas of what constitutes life rather than the practical, everyday challenges that face women and mothers.

Contemporary Polish Women's Magazines

The popular media constitutes an important site for the shaping of discourses around femininity and the roles of women in society. Women's magazines are the location where transitions within these discourses are especially visible. Agnieszka Piwowarska in the introduction to her study that explores the history of a popular Polish magazine for young women entitled *Filipinka* composes a narrative that involves a hypothetical female teenager and her first encounter with the magazine (perhaps based closely on her own experiences):

> One day, she noticed a magazine that did not have a foreign sounding title, only an unusual Polish name, "Filipinka". On the cover, instead of a divorcing or rising star or a model made up into a vamp there was an ordinary teenager. . . . There was no photo-story, the thing that she usually read first, and the fashion section covered only three pages and featured the kind of clothes that she wore and could buy herself. Instead of celebrity gossip there were theatre reviews sent in by the readers. And the texts, which in the content summary were called columns had strange titles such as "Encounters with language", "Mixed goods", "Greetings to you poets", "Feather duvet", or "Academy of good manners". Instead of the answers to letters by thirteen-year-olds there were interviews with sexologists and an episode of a re-printed novel on the last pages. . . . When she bought the next issue of the magazine, she read a report about a young woman in Sarajevo, her family and friends and their lives during the war in the city attacked by snipers. (Piwowarska 2003)

The story continues to describe how the young woman inspired by the magazine read its recommended books and attended cinema and theatre more often. She also decided to become a journalist in order to write similar articles to those she read in *Filipinka*. Her school friends shared her enthusiasm for the magazine and often borrowed it from her. This lasted two years until *Filipinka* changed hands in 1998 and, according to the protagonist, began to resemble a teenage magazine that she used to read in primary school.

As Agniszka Piwowarska further describes in her dissertation entitled "The three faces of *Filipinka*", the magazine was originally founded in 1957 after young readers demanded in an open letter printed in another periodical for more mature women to have their own, more appropriate title. This request led to the birth of the magazine which kept a fairly constant format until the fall of socialism when it underwent a series of quite rapid transformations. In 1990, the state publishing body that governed print media during the socialist period, Robotnicza Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza *Prasa–Książka–Ruch* (The Workers' Publishing Cooperative "Press–Book–Movement") was dissolved and a new press act granted the existing editorial teams the right to establish their own publishing units. The following year, an independent publishing co-operative

named Filipinka was founded. This co-operative published the *Filipinka* as encountered by the hypothetical heroine above. The same year, to strengthen their financial position, Filipinka entered into partnership with another publishing co-operative that owned a fashion magazine for the plus twenties market called *Twój Styl* (Your Style). In 1993, the Polish media market was flooded with new, foreign-originated magazines, such as *Bravo Girl!* and *Dziewczyna* (Girl), whose financial and promotional potential was impossible to match by *Filipinka*. Subsequently, in 1998, *Filipinka* was taken over by *Twój Styl*. Piwowarska notes that the readers were the last to find out about the changes but one of the issues released before the takeover included a questionnaire that aimed to broaden the editors' knowledge about the preferences of their readers. The new *Filipinka* according to the editors was to be bigger, zappier and more colourful. And, as Piwowarska points out, once the magazine was re-launched, eleven pages were devoted to fashion and this constituted fourteen per cent of the magazine's content. *Filipinka* at last fulfilled its long-standing goal of becoming "a small *Your Style*".

Another transformation took place in 2002, when *Twój Styl* and with it *Filipinka* were sold to a German corporation, Bauer Media. Bauer supported entirely by German capital originally entered the Polish market in 1991 with the previously mentioned magazines *Bravo* and *Bravo Girl!*. Once again the editors claimed that the changes of the magazine's aesthetics and content reflected the wishes of the readers: "We revolutionised *Filipinka* with your help. Everything is different. Now you will find in your magazine more topics, stars, boys, advice and interesting texts. You asked for more variety and we granted this wish". Notably, in 2003, the editor-in-chief of the magazine resigned and was replaced by none other than the editor-in-chief of *Bravo Girl!*. The character of the changes within *Filipinka* is illustrative of the transformations within the Polish press market in general. Another researcher into Polish print media, Ryszard Filas (2010) distinguishes as many as eight stages of

transformation within the Polish press between 1989 and 2009, five between 1989 and 1999, and the remaining three in the twenty-first century reflecting the emergence of new technologies of media production, such as the internet.

> Did the systemic transformation in Poland since 1989 really bring among other things, the desired freedom of women's magazines? Or was it rather the case that the abolished censorship was replaced by the tough rules of the market depending on the customer demand? And finally, what is the influence of those changes on modern Polish women, their expectations of themselves, and of men and their needs? (Zaworska-Nikoniuk 2008, 524)

These are some of the questions raised within the previously quoted work by Zaworska-Nikoniuk who explored the women's press in Poland. Zaworska-Nikoniuk reveals that during the socialist era there existed approximately 63 magazines for women. In comparison, after the fall of socialism, as many as 138 new titles came into existence. Many newly founded magazines were initially translations of foreign equivalents. Zaworska-Nikoniuk stresses that, in the present new market economy, advertising constitutes approximately 70 percent of magazines' revenues. This practical implication influences the magazines' contents.

The analysis by Zaworska-Nikoniuk shows that the contents of contemporary women's magazines in Poland constitute an eclectic mix. What is a highly visible, qualitative change in the new magazines is the emphasis on bodily characteristics. The central ideal of femininity presented in an overwhelming majority of magazines coheres around dieting, cosmetics and fitness. Zaworska-Nikoniuk quotes another researcher, Zbyszko Melosik (1995), who noted that "a woman is evidently tyrannised by texts and images that force a critical appraisal of her body – especially in the context of body weight. She is informed, for example, of what is an ideal measurement in centimetres for her waist" (135). Zaworska-Nikoniuk argues that the attempts to define feminine identity purely in terms of bodily characteristics might constitute an effort to diffuse

women's interests away from any collective and ideological activity and therefore remove any capacity in which they could exert an influence on political, economic and social life.

Furthermore, according to Zaworska-Nikoniuk, female protagonists in magazines continue to be defined vis-à-vis their relationships and domestic roles. The woman of the new magazines is not only a worker, but also a lover, wife, mother and the object of desire, who never tires emotionally or physically of trying to meet the demands of all these roles. Zaworska-Nikoniuk points out that, whereas before the change of the political system, popular actresses, female doctors or writers featured in magazines in the context of their public or occupational role, the businesswomen presented in today's magazines tend to be repositioned back into the domestic sphere in their simultaneous roles of mothers and wives. Zaworska-Nikoniuk notes also that although some upmarket titles sympathise with the feminist movement, in more accessible media, feminist beliefs are either ridiculed or approached with caution. Capitalising on the gains of feminism is often advocated but without any references to the movement. Even more often, feminist discourses are appropriated for commercial advantage.

In another study entitled "Wash, Clean, Make Love: Be an Ideal Woman" Zaworska-Nikoniuk (2004) analysed low-end weekly magazines such as *Pani Domu* (Housewife or in literal translation The Lady of the House), *Tina* and *Naj* (Best). According to Zaworksa-Nikoniuk the magazines convey the main goal of a woman as to keep a man and preserve his love. A woman is to meet a suitable man, fall in love from the first sight, get married, have children and give up her career – so that she fits in the "love, motherhood and marriage" model (defined by Bogusława Burdowska 2000, 25). Zaworksa-Nikoniuk argues that the scripts promoted by the magazines match the traditional and patriarchal ideals that dominate in rural and small-town Polish

environments. Within the scripts, a man is always somebody you are married to, not just a partner or a lover. A woman is first of all a wife and a mother, in other words: a traditional woman. She pursues marriage and motherhood and when this endeavour does not work out – and women's magazines are full of stories of unsuccessful marriages – she remains married if only for the children and… goes on loving her man. Zaworska-Nikoniuk points to a relative lack of instances of average marriages. The ones that are described are either ideal couples (usually involving actresses or music celebrities) or families facing all sorts of tragedies – or rather life experiences that are intended to be perceived as tragedies by the readers. These experiences include: the husband not wanting children, an inability to become pregnant, or the husband's involvement with another woman.

A somewhat more positive picture is revealed by the Zaworska-Nikoniuk's (2008) discussion of the upmarket glossy magazines that burgeoned in Poland after the fall of socialism, such as *Cosmopolitan*, *Pani* (Lady), *Zwierciadło* (Mirror), and *Twój Styl*. What is specific here to the Polish context is the emphasis on education, improving qualifications, the fostering of individual passions and the investment in spiritual life. This is visible across the titles including the Polish edition of *Cosmopolitan* where the target audience is a higher education student or graduate forever expanding her qualifications and skills, for example learning languages, in order to secure the job of her dreams. This is often illustrated by the stories of women who succeeded in getting into typically male professions. Sometimes examples of sex discrimination in the workplace are discussed.

Within the ideals promoted by the Polish edition of *Cosmopolitan*, according to the author, the traditional ideal of the Polish Mother is absent and the attitude towards family and parenthood differ from the stereotypical representations of female and male roles. Parenthood is planned and postponed until after women are educated and achieve

a good position in the job market. Couples are living in egalitarian relationships with both women and men taking an active role in the bringing up of their children and the sharing of domestic chores. An ideal man and a husband as portrayed by these magazines is sensitive, caring, friendly and engaged in family life. As Zaworska-Nikoniuk puts it "he rejects patriarchal masculinity as unwanted ballast of cultural inheritance" (370). However, *Cosmopolitan* is an exception here in that it presents contrasting representations of masculinity: the sex obsessed, predatory and emotionally inept sexual conqueror against that of the long-term sensitive, loving and committed partner. Zaworska-Nikoniuk explains this inconsistency in terms of changing life-span priorities. Perhaps after the initial period of youthful preoccupations with sexual conquests, football and beer, having finally found a suitable wife, a man at last settles down ready for long-term commitment.

Liberal anti-feminism, according to Krzysztof Tomasik (2004), is what characterises *Wysokie Obcasy* (High Heels), the weekend "women's" supplement to Poland's largest, centre-left daily newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* (Election Paper). Conversely, *Wysokie Obcasy* is frequently viewed as a feminist publication and the magazine was founded to address the lack of press reflecting the strong position of the women's rights movement in Poland. Indeed, alongside adverts for fashion and cosmetics, there are "serious" articles, interviews and editorials, as well as regular contributions from the Polish feminists such as Kinga Dunin and Magdalena Środa. At the same time, the publication routinely features texts that hardly distinguish it from other popular, commercial women's titles. For example, "Isn't the hair that is naturally present on the body beautiful exactly because of its naturalness? No it isn't. Men are capricious and while they like hair on a woman's body here and there, in some places they find it repulsive" (quoted in Tomasik 2004). Despite these contradictions, *Wysokie*

Obcasy has acquired the reputation of an icon within Polish culture and now also *Wysokie Obcasy Extra*, a separate, stand-alone publication is also regularly released.

The above studies show that the imperative of transformation as well as the competence to juggle different skills, demands and roles – whether within the domestic, intellectual or bodily sphere – continues to be emphasised across women's magazines. Despite the claims about gender egalitarianism women are still defined in the context of their domestic roles, as mothers, wives, carers and cleaners. Simultaneously they must stay healthy, physically fit and well groomed. They are also expected to aspire to acquire the education and occupational skills that would help them to secure a successful professional career.

Sex Advice and Education in Poland

When discussing formal sex education in Poland it impossible not to point to the role of the Catholic Church as a powerful political actor. Prior to 1989, both Solidarity and the Church represented mass opposition to communism and since the change of the system both organisations have co-operated in promoting a return to the traditional family ideals of the pre-socialist era (Zielińska 2000). Indeed, according to Heinen and Wator (2006) the Church not only ensured that the previously discussed image of *Matka Polka* would survive communism, but that it will endure beyond the context of resistance to the old political system. Consequently, many teaching programmes and guidelines were adjusted to comply with the ruling coalition's ideology, for example, recommending that the so-called natural family planning approaches are taught, whereas other birth control methods are described in such a way as to emphasise their danger to health and morality (Wóycicka and Dominiczak 2000, 9). "Non-natural" birth control methods are often placed closely alongside abortion and often associated with the acceptance of something defined as the "civilisation of death" as opposed to the

"civilisation of life" espoused by the Pope John Paul II (Tarasiewicz and Walczewska 2005, 3).

The Polish Law on Family Planning and the Protection of a Human Foetus established in 1993 contained in its original version the directives that would introduce sexual education to primary and secondary schools. As a result of the intensification of the influence of Catholicism over sex and relationship education in December 1998, the law was amended and sexual education as a separate subject entitled "Knowledge of human sexual life" was withdrawn from the school curricula (Psyk 2010). The subject with a biased name such as "Wychowanie do życia w rodzinie" (Preparation for the family life), which potentially provides the scope for teaching about issues of sex and sexuality, was until recently non-compulsory and parents were obliged to give a written agreement for their child to participate. From September 2009, however, a new decree by the Minister of Education means that only these students whose parents *oppose* in writing to their participation in the lessons can now be excluded (Jasita 2010).

Noteworthy here are also the past failed attempts of the Polish educational authorities to create a sex education textbook. In 1987, such a textbook was written but vetoed by the Church authorities so stopping it from ever reaching the classroom. Another text, co-authored by the eminent Polish sexologist, Zbigniew Lew-Starowicz, in 1995 suffered a similar fate. Bishop Tadeusz Pieronek, in an interview to one of the Polish newspapers, branded the text dangerous and scandalous as well as teaching young people perversions and reducing things to biology (Grzegorska 1995). The other points of criticism included the emphasis on sex rather than love, the promotion of sexual activity outside the context of a loving marital relationship (Panasiuk 1995) and the discussion of contraceptive methods that are incompatible with the ethics of religion (Wolicka 1996).

In the third largest city of Łódź many students in secondary education have been encouraged to form youth clubs as part of an "abstinence" programme (Podgórska 2009; Markowski 2010). Thirty Polish teachers who joined the initiative received training in the delivery of the programme from instructors of a similar scheme established in the 1990s in Louisiana in the USA. The emphasis here was on total sexual abstinence until marriage with the main goal of preventing unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections. The programme creators claimed that abstinence is the only fully effective contraceptive method and sex before marriage is dangerous for the emotional development of young people. Many students who participated in the summer schools that aimed to popularise the programme were ambivalent about its messages and admitted that they were uncertain about its main purpose believing that the abstinence in the programme's title related to drugs and alcohol (Podgórska 2009). Some simply wanted to take part in a free summer camp and meet other people. Only a small minority declared their willingness to establish abstinence clubs in their schools. Polish sex educator and sexologist, Zbigniew Izdebski (quoted in Podgórska 2009), pointed to the programme's extreme and ideological character and emphasised the need for an unbiased and thorough sex education.

It comes as no surprise then that today's debate about sexual learning of young people takes place in the context of profound criticism of how and according to whose needs the policies of sex education and birth control are being implemented in Poland. The powerful role of the Catholic Church in Poland, its influence within the spheres of politics, law, and especially reproductive rights, invites controversy. The Polish feminist activist and columnist, Magdalena Środa (2009), examines the sex education ruling introduced in 1993, whose main purpose was to reduce the number of abortions. The author stresses that the only effect of the ruling 16 years after its introduction is a higher number of hidden, illegal abortions and incidences of human drama. In the same

article, the issue of contemporary teen magazines in Poland is discussed, and the author asks if they should be the only platform where issues of sex amongst young people are addressed. She points out that in these magazines the agony aunts' replies are "competent but laconic and random" (41).

The status of professional sexology and self-help directed at adults represents somewhat of an antidote to the field of school sex education that is shrouded in controversy. Indeed, professional sexology in Poland has a long-standing tradition and a secured reputation with some sexologists, such as Michalina Wisłocka and Zbigniew Lew-Starowicz, enjoying a household name status. It is usually formally trained sexologists who provide sex and relationships advice, not only in sex manuals but also in magazines, radio and television programmes as well as on the pages of the internet.

The first notable name that should be mentioned is that of Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński (1874–1941). Polish writer, translator, poet, critic and a member of the Polish Literary Academy, Boy Żeleński was also an activist physician who campaigned for the liberalisation and secularisation of marriage legislation (including civil marriage, divorce rights and alimony for single mothers) as well as the introduction of sex education and birth control. His publication entitled *Piekło Kobiet* (Women's Hell [1930] 1960) is a collection of writings strongly advocating decriminalisation of abortion and is one of the most popular and often quoted texts on reproductive rights in Poland to this day. As Katarzyna Pabijanek argues:

> The influence of Boy-Żeleński's work on the present day feminist movement in Poland remains strong and positive: the *Federacja na Rzecz Kobiet and Rozwoju Rodziny* (Federation for Women and Family Planning) advocates continuing his work on the reproductive rights in its statute. In 2003, when a collection of testimonies of women who suffered under the Polish anti-abortion law was published, it was entitled *Piekło Kobiet. Historie Współczesne* (Women's Hell: Contemporary Stories). Boy-Żeleński is both accepted and appreciated by Polish feminists, and well known as a women's reproductive rights advocate by mainstream readers. (Pabijanek 2006, 619)

Another key figure in Polish sexology was Michalina Wisłocka (1921 – 2005), who in terms of sexual knowledge is claimed to have taken socialist Poland out of the dark ages. Her most popular book, *Sztuka Kochania* (The Art of Loving), was originally published in 1976 but it has been regularly reprinted to this day. The central theme of *The Art of Loving* is the orgasm difficulties experienced by women and their impact on marital satisfaction. Wisłocka in her book pioneers a self-designed therapy for overcoming this problem. I will discuss the work of Michalina Wisłocka in greater detail in Chapter Five.

Zbigniew Lew-Starowicz represents an eminent, contemporary personality of Polish sexology. He is a physician with specialisation in psychiatry who completed a doctorate in sexology. Lew-Starowicz lectures and holds academic posts at several higher education institutions in Warsaw. He is an executive member of the Polish Sexological Association, the Polish Sexual Medicine Association and the Medical Centre for Postgraduate Studies in the Specialisation of Sexology. The former organisation is a regulatory body for the qualification into the field of clinical sexology. The qualification, primarily aimed at medical graduates and psychologists, can be achieved by a candidate after he or she amasses a thousand credit points (for activities such as participation in recognised postgraduate courses and sexological conferences or organising workshops) and passes the qualifying examination. Zbigniew Lew-Starowicz is an author of about 45 books, including reference, medical and popular texts covering a wide range of topics such as homosexuality, controversial or atypical sex, sex and disability, sex in art and the already mentioned ill-fated work intended as a sex education textbook. Lew-Starowicz is a frequent guest on *Pytanie na Śniadanie* (Questions at Breakfast), which is, as the title suggests, a popular daytime television programme.

The Women's Movement in Poland

> Drag queens, for instance, have been an important presence at many feminist events. One of Warsaw's most impressive drag performances (witnessed at a women's festival in the spring of 2002) involved heavy make-up, a bishop's robe and a karaoke performance of Brenda Lee's sappy, romantic song "I'm sorry" (1960). The context – perfectly clear to everyone at the time – was the scandal concerning Juliusz Paetz, the archbishop of Poznan, whose long history of sexual harassment of clerics had just been revealed by the press. Now, consider that this mock apology was performed by a cross-dressing gay man for an audience of young feminist women in a country whose laws and customs concerning sexual mores and reproduction are, to put it mildly, heavily influenced by the Roman Catholic Church. No wonder the audience was enthusiastic. If we were to apply American chronology to this particular moment, we would probably have to call it a third wave form for a second wave content in a backlash context. (Graff 2003, 103)

Considering the above discussion, can we be optimistic about the post-1989 transformations in terms of gains for women? Although the state provided childcare was insufficient and the job guarantee for women meant access to only certain types of professional positions, these crucial assets became scarce after the system change. Also, Polish women have been presented with increasing consumer possibilities but in turn their reproductive rights have been restricted. The fast or even galvanised development of the women's rights and feminist movements with groups established to tackle the variety of problems faced by women indicate that there exists a huge scope for improvement. The freedom to protest and to publish independently certainly helped in this area but a feminist consciousness is something that is qualitatively new or re-born in recent years in Poland. The British researcher Peggy Watson (1997, 146) observes that in 1989 the gender difference in Poland acquired a potent political meaning, which was hidden in the earlier system of assumed gender equality. This "reconfiguration" of women as a "minority group" was a pre-condition for the development of feminist consciousness.

Jill Bystydzienski (2001, 503) who talked to Polish students in 1986 observed that the powerful influence of discourses of presumed gender equality under socialism meant many women did not see a need for feminism while some women students she talked to even believed that women in Poland had "too much equality". Furthermore, Polish women often saw the feminist movement in the West as irrelevant to their lives and disassociated themselves from its perceived lesbian-dominated and anti-male image. The primary women's organisation under socialism *Liga Kobiet Polskich* (League of Polish Women) was not motivated by feminist ideals (Siemieńska 1991) and its main goal was to "facilitate women's adaptation to the expectations and demands outlined in the state plans of socio-economic development" (Bystydzienski 2001, 502).

In 1980, partly as a response to Solidarity's conservative agenda towards women's issues, a feminist group was established at the University of Warsaw (Bystydzienski 2001). Following a failed attempt at consolidation into Solidarity, the group continued as a small discussion and support unit, while its members individually supported women in Solidarity and other emerging women's movements. During the time of the imposition of martial law and the profound crisis of the political and economic situation issues of gender inequality appeared trivial (Siemieńska 1991). In 1989, the main funding body for Solidarity's activity, the International Confederation of Trade Unions with its headquarters in Brussels expressed its concern over the union's neglect with regards to the situation of women. In response to this, a women's section of Solidarity was established. Initially, the section concentrated on activities such as media workshops for union activists but then it developed its own union agenda (Helsinki Human Rights Watch 1992). By 1990, the section had 10,000 members with active groups in 10 out of 38 regions in Poland (Einhorn 1993, 196). The number rose to 22,000 in 1995 (Bystydzienski 2001). However as previously discussed, the pro-choice stance of the women's section of Solidarity attracted severe criticism from other

members of Solidarity leading to the exclusion of the section members from many activities and the decision-making processes of the movement.

Despite these limitations and the inability of the section to influence the Solidarity's movement conservative stance on gender issues, women's involvement became an avenue for the development of independent women's groups (Bystydzienski 2001). The reforms of 1989 that introduced the freedom to demonstrate, publish and distribute without the state's intervention gave the impetus for the establishment of the Polish Feminist Association that brought together a number of other women's groups and organisations. In 2000, there were about 150 registered women's organisations (Bystydzienski 2001, 506). Not all of them were, however, feminist. The battle over the women's rights to self-determination, especially within the sphere of reproductive rights was what initially brought many Polish women to action. For example, an organisation named *Pro Femina* was the first of the many groups established to address the issue of abortion.

Feminism as a movement currently flourishes in academic settings with the emergence of several centres of Women's and Gender Studies in the major universities in Poland, including the Interdisciplinary Group for Research on Gender Issues in Society at Warsaw University, the Women's Studies Interdisciplinary Research Group of the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań and the Women's Studies Centre at the University of Łódź (Bystydzienski 2001, 507). But feminist activism oscillates not only around the academic world but encompasses a diverse group that includes professional, religious movements, sections of political parties and local Polish branches of international women's groups. Amongst them there are organisations and movements founded to tackle specific goals, such as working with abused women or single mothers or supporting women in business and commercial enterprise. Some groups are formally organised while others remain non-formalised.

Notable organisations outside academic circles include *The Network of East-West Women*/NEWW Polska, an independent Polish association that shares the same mission and goals as the NEWW based in the United States; a group called *Ulica Siostrzana* (Sisterly Street) that organises summer camps for women; *Ośrodek Informacji Środowisk Kobiecych* (OŚKA, Centre for Women's Organisations Information Exchange); and eFKA, which according to their own website, is "a feminist organization, founded in March 1991, whose main goal is to support solidarity and independence among women, to counteract discrimination against women, and to develop women's culture". eFKA is also the publisher of the feminist quarterly entitled *Zadra* (Splinter), which is the most popular of the five feminist magazines and widely available in Poland (Graff 2003, 102). Other notable organisations include La Strada Foundation that was founded in 1996 to work against the trafficking of women. Informal anarchist feminist groups also exist in Poland and are often associated with the alternative music scene. Within these groups and also independently of them there exists a proliferation of internet discussion circles, where matters such as incidents of sexism and misogyny in the media and advertising are discussed and the participants often write letters to the organisations involved in order to challenge these issues.

However, probably the most important venture that unites especially the younger generation of Polish feminists, including the author Agnieszka Graff, is the annual demonstration on the 8th of March (International Women's Day) commonly known as *manifa*, which is Polish for "demo" (Martynia 2003, 16). The demonstration – that invariably attracts very considerable media attention – takes place in different cities of Poland with the main demonstration in the capital organised by another feminist organisation called *Porozumienie Kobiet 8 Marca* (8th of March Women's Movement). Each year, *manifa* aims to address different aspects of gender discrimination in Poland. In 2003, one of the banners stated "I've had enough! (signed) Matka Polka".

Alongside the reproductive rights, another widely-discussed feminist issue within Polish media – including the pages of the major Polish newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* – is that of the *parytet* or the guaranteed equal number or a set quota of male and female candidates on parliamentary electoral lists. The initiative is supported by *Kongres Kobiet Polskich* (Congress of Polish Women) which took place in June 2010 and at the time of writing the directive is still in its decision and development stage. Some commentators, such as the American feminist Professor Joan Wallach Scott (Duda 2010), believe that *parytet* would not necessarily support gender equality but rather help to reinforce the notion of the apparent innate differences between men and women that underpin the complementary gender characteristics without challenging the traditional constraints of the governance system based on masculine universalism. Consequently, female politicians would be consigned to roles that deal with areas traditionally viewed as feminine, such as "the number of state funded nurseries and kindergartens or social support for older people" (22).

Other commentators oppose the idea by arguing that guaranteed representation for women is derogatory because it perceives women as disabled and in need of special support (Michaliszyn 2010). These commentators contend that the position of women in relation to men in Poland is historically unique rendering the conceptualisation of women as victims that often characterises western feminism as completely irrelevant. Indeed, in Poland ideas concerning women's liberation are often seen as forced and artificial and either associated with the imposed ethics of the past communist system or with the "naive" ideologies of the West (Wóycicka and Dominiczak 2000). As Agnieszka Graff (2003, 104) observes, "Polish women are immune to feminism today; it is much too close to Marxism, and we all know what that means. Besides, this is a land of strong, independent women – postfeminists of sorts – who know their worth and shrug off the very idea of 'discrimination'". Graff explores the impact and character of

feminist activism in Poland and asks what makes the public discourse on women's rights in Poland "an odd mixture of backlash rhetoric, postfeminist rambling, and good old misogyny – without any self-reflection whatsoever". Let me illustrate Graff's claim with a quote from a Polish psychologist, Zofia Milska-Wrzosińska, who, in an interview for the magazine *Twój Styl* in a reply to the allegation that she favours the interests of men over that of women, said:

> After my text about the women who want a man not only to support his family but to be sensitive, happily change the nappies and the tyres, I was told in private, yes, this is true but highlighting this truth does nothing for the "the women's case". Well, after many years of communism, I don't like so called "cases". Men have changed in comparison to what their fathers used to be like. They clean, bath their children, cry, express their emotions, look for the G spot like for a rare flower, and some women still say, "not enough". (Sztyler 2010, 44)

To explain further why feminism is so often despised in Poland, Graff (2003) cites the argument provided by Ewa Siderenko (2000) who believes that Polish insular national identities are firmly embedded within the private sphere of home, family and religion because this is where during the decades of intrusive and corrupt state socialism many Polish people found safe haven. This Polish cultural trait is marked by the lack of an explicit collectivist orientation. Other explanations for the public denouncement of feminism provided by Graff include the backlash rhetoric troubled by the contradiction: women's rights in this time of political and economic upheaval are a luxury the country cannot afford and Poland does not need them because Polish people already live in matriarchy. The latter belief is associated with the idea of feminine power inscribed into the tradition of *Matka Polka*. Graff also argues that in the mid 1980s when Eastern Europe began opening to the West, the Polish feminist backlash acquired an additional meaning with a new assertion that it is really men who are oppressed today and as a result of feminism women have lost their natural feminine warmth. Finally, Graff

comments on the popularity of the "pop versions of evolutionary psychology", with John Gray's *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* (1992) continuous presence at the top of Poland's best-seller list. Graff concludes, "Now, the Polish public is being told that patriarchal gender roles are firmly grounded in Mother Nature's plan, but without having been exposed to the opposite claim" (106). All the above-discussed reasons contribute perhaps to the fact that the Polish feminist movement has been variedly conceptualised as "slow" (Bystydzienski 2001) and "relatively successful" (Martynia 2003). However, Graff (2003, 100) sees the future of Polish feminist movement in positive terms and concludes that although "often tormented by self-doubt", it "is growing in numbers and becoming radicalized by the hour".

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to set the background for my further research inquiry and data analysis. It explored the legacy of Polish assumed gender equality as well as the ethos of education that will be further examined by looking into my study's interview narratives. The discussion initiated here about the powerful tradition of *Matka Polka* and the strong position of the nuclear family within the Polish national psyche sets the scene for further analysis of the participants' narratives about monogamous heterosexual relationships, gender roles and the status of women. The Polish discourse of sex advice will be interrogated in context in Chapter Five, which is devoted to the textual analysis of self-help materials. The transforming Polish media with a specific focus on teenage and women's magazines will also be discussed in more detail in further chapters. The women's rights movement as well as feminist consciousness and identification in Poland will be explored in Chapter Nine. In the next chapter I will delineate the methodological framework for this research project and discuss the approaches that I deployed to investigate the questions that I introduced in

the first chapter of this thesis. More specifically, I will outline the methods of data collection, transcription, translation and analysis as well as explain the rationale, motivations and challenges related to my chosen methodological perspective and procedures.

Chapter Four

Methods

This research project is a feminist-informed examination of the representations of female sexuality in popular culture and media where the data that were analysed consisted of semi-structured interviews with young women in Poland, as well as popular Polish sex advice materials. My research inquiry assumes a poststructuralist stance. "Researchers in this tradition do not usually aim or claim to capture the truth of reality but to offer an interpretation or version which is inevitably partial" (Taylor 2001, 11). An advantage of poststructuralist perspective is its recognition that a "conscious awareness of the contradictory nature of subjectivity can introduce the possibility of political choice between modes of femininity in different situations and between the discourses in which they have their meaning" (Weedon 1987, 87).

The research questions of this thesis were outlined in the introduction but I would like to reiterate them here in order to set the context for the discussion of my chosen research methods. The research questions that this thesis explores are:

- What are the dominant discourses of female sexuality in Poland and how do young Polish women understand and position themselves in relation to these discourses?
- What role do these discourses play in the reproduction of certain models of femininity and female sexuality and in which contexts do they become restrictive?
- What structural and rhetorical properties of text or talk are utilised in the identified discursive modes of representation?

- Can the insight gained through the exploration of the Polish context add to our understanding of regulative regimes of gender and sexuality that operate on a more global level?

In this chapter I will discuss the methods I deployed to explore the above research questions. More specifically, I will outline here my chosen approaches to data collection and analysis as well as explain the rationale, motivations and challenges related to my chosen methodological perspective and procedures. The first section will focus on the practical aspects of data collection including the recruitment of participants, procedure and materials used. The second section will describe the data analysis approaches that I deployed for the examination of interview and textual data. Finally, the last, third section will explore the methodological challenges and the rationale behind my chosen methodological approaches.

Data Collection

Participants

I interviewed 32 participants. Twenty of these participants were recruited through an advertisement on Grono.net, which is a large student social networking website in Poland. I also placed an advertisement on the lex.edu.pl website which constitutes a networking facility for law students in Poland. I will refer to the informants recruited through students' internet sites as Group A. I also recruited twelve participants who were self-declared feminists. These participants were recruited through advertisements on feminist discussion forums of organisations such as eFKA, a Polish feminist organisation dedicated to promoting solidarity and independence amongst women, as well as challenging gender discrimination; and *Porozumienie*

Kobiet 8 Marca (8th of March Women's Movement), an informal group founded to challenge restrictions within reproductive rights as well as being responsible for the organisation of the annual feminist demonstration. As previously discussed, I recruited feminist participants because feminist narratives around the issues of sexuality might provide an invaluable perspective on the topic and the questions explored in this research and they are especially relevant in the view of the increasing popularity of feminist discourse within the public agenda in Poland. The informants recruited through feminist internet forums will be defined in this and the following chapters as Group B.

All participants were women between 18 and 35 years old. On average the participants in Group B were slightly older than the participants in Group A, that is, more participants in Group B were over the age of 25 and two of them were over the age of 30, while no participants in Group A were older than 29. All participants in Group A were – or expected to become the following year – students of medicine or law and all participants in Group B had a university education. All participants lived or studied in Warsaw, Kraków or Katowice. I did not enquire about the sexual orientation of participants but two participants declared during the interviews that they were bisexual and one declared that she was a lesbian.

Before recruiting participants I applied for and received the Open University research ethics committee clearance. I ensured the anonymity of my participants by using pseudonyms rather than their real names in the thesis and confidentiality dictated that I only recorded participant details that were relevant to my research, such as the age and educational background. I also emphasised to the participants prior to the interviews that the aim and focus of the research was to collect their opinion and views about sexuality and not specific personal recollections. This information was conveyed to the participants in the research information sheet and participant consent form (both

enclosed in Appendices) as well as through talking through the information sheet prior to starting the interviews.

Procedure

Overall, I made three visits to Poland to conduct the interviews. One visit was an opportunity visit, a holiday which I also utilised to conduct six individual interviews with self-declared feminists. The next two visits were organised especially with the purpose of interviewing participants. During the second visit I interviewed individually six more participants from Group B and 13 participants from Group A. Informants in Group A were interviewed in two groups of five and one group of three while informants in Group B were interviewed individually.

Interviewing participants from Group B individually, while interviewing participants from another group in groups, was dictated by a number of practical factors. Initially, when posting on feminist internet discussion forums I put an advertisement for interviews with individuals. Later, before the second visit, my time constraints and financial considerations made me decide to advertise on student networking sites for participants to be interviewed in groups. Also, I thought that this might be an encouragement for these participants to take part as they could come along with their fellow student friends or colleagues. At the same time, individual interviews seemed to suit better the self-declared feminists who – although participating in internet discussion forums – were not as closely connected and their availability to participate, especially in a group, was subject to more time constraints.

During the second visit, however, I became aware of the different dynamics of interviewing individually and in groups and I wanted to limit the possibility that my approaches to interviewing the informants within the two groups were not equally balanced. For example, the features of group interviews such as turn taking,

interruption and interactional feedback from other participants can have an impact on how meaning is collectively produced. As speech act theorist, Daniel Vanderveken points out:

> Speakers perform their illocutionary acts within entire conversations where they are most often in verbal interaction with other speakers who reply to them and perform in turn their own speech acts with the same collective intention to pursue with success a certain type of discourse. (Vanderveken 1994, 53)

To rectify the lack of equivalence between the interviewing strategies of the two groups, I organised another visit to Poland, during which I interviewed seven participants in Group A individually.

Following the placement of the advertisements, my participants and I communicated via email or text messages. Most interviews took place in a large hotel room or a hired apartment in Kraków. Two participants were interviewed in their homes, one in a university lecture room and another in a feminist activist centre. When interviews took place in private homes, my partner accompanied me to ensure my safety. This was a large volume of interviews for one researcher to organise and conduct. Distances, as well as co-ordination of timings, mostly arranged from abroad, were also a challenge.

Individual interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes, while group interviews were about an hour long. All interviews were semi-structured and although I had some pre-set questions (enclosed in Appendix Three) as well as quotes from sex advice materials (enclosed in Appendix Four) that were there to serve as prompts, the content of the interviews was dictated by the flow of the conversation. The conversations typically covered topics such as sex education, the roles and representations of women in the media in general and in specific sex advice texts, happiness and satisfaction in relationships, sexual pleasure, reproductive rights and choices, sexual orientations and

feminist activism. Interviews were recorded using a Sony analogue cassette recorder. Before each interview I handed out a copy of the research information sheet and the participant consent form for each participant to fill in and sign. Before and after each interview the participants were given a chance to ask questions about the research and their participation.

Here, the difficult question of informed consent becomes pertinent. While feminist participants were aware of the feminist orientation of my study, I did not disclose the feminist orientation or the fact that the study involved two groups to the participants who did not explicitly declared themselves as feminists. Therefore, this raises the question whether the Group A interviewees in my research would still consent if they knew that I was a feminist and I would be juxtaposing their accounts with the accounts given by feminist activists? In my decision not to disclose the feminist nature of my inquiry, I was guided by the comments of Weatherall, Gavey and Potts, who pointed out that:

> It is reasonable to expect that an explanation of our theoretical and political positions, or our mode of analysis, may affect how participants respond during interviews. Sometimes this might be counterproductive to the aims of the research, in that it may curtail the kind of talk that we are particularly interested in or silence certain kinds of accounts. For example, when conducting research on the discourse of men who are not pro-feminist, fully informing participants about the feminist perspective of the research may jeopardize the material required for a useful analysis of power in this context. (Weatherall, Gavey, and Potts 2002, 534)

Furthermore, I acknowledge that, as Duncombe and Jessop (2002, 111) point out, "it is impossible for interviewees to give their fully informed consent at the outset of a qualitative interview whose direction cannot be anticipated". Therefore, I felt that specifying the nature of my inquiry, while not guaranteeing the ethics of full informed consent, would "impact on [my] data production" (Ramazanoğlu and Holland 2002, 157) and accentuate the difference between me and my participants. As feminism is not

a neutral or uncontentious topic, I did not want this quality to become a focal point or a lens through which our conversations were produced with my interviewees trying to position themselves in or outside feminist orientation rather than explore the issues at hand. It is important to stress that the informants recruited through student networking sites might have not aligned themselves explicitly with feminist views during the interviews not because they opposed feminist ideas but because they did not wish to be associated with a feminist label, which in Poland, as in other geographical locations, attracts pejorative connotations. (See Chapter Nine for further discussion of the dilemmas of feminist identification.)

Another more practical challenge of this piece of research was the substantial quantity of data collected, which meant a significant amount of time had to be spent transcribing the interviews. However, the process of transcription, whilst at times somewhat arduous, was also an excellent way for me to familiarise myself with the data. The transcription convention that I used to represent my data is a minimal, playscript/orthographic transcription. The decision to use this level of data representation rather than the Jefferson Lite type of transcription (Parker 2005) reflects a number of theoretical and pragmatic considerations: my research orientation and interests; the nature of the study; the character and volume of the interview data; and the type of analysis conducted. This study aims to explore a broad range of topics, many of which have not yet been widely researched within a non-western context. The broad focus of this study and the desire to map as wide a territory as possible also dictated the level of detail of the data transcription. Unlike in the case of text analysis deployed in this project (see below), were I explored some specific linguistic features of the texts, for the interview data analysis part of this study I was more interested in capturing the recurrent discursive patterns across different conversations.

Another reason that influenced my decision not to pursue detailed transcription is that detailed written representation of the spoken word does not survive translation very well. All interviews, except for the one carried out in English, were conducted in Polish. Trying to replicate stress, intonation and pauses in translated text, where the original language differs from the target language in respect to these very characteristics, occurred to me as artificial. I was also concerned about the possibly of introducing another level of separation between the speakers and the analysed data where problems of accuracy and interpretation might occur. The transcription symbols that were used in the analysis are explained in Chapter Six.

Only the excerpts that I quoted in the chapters were translated. I consider myself very fluent in both languages and familiar with both cultures. One of the two main challenges that I encountered as a translator was that it is not always possible to find equivalent words that will evoke similar associations, feelings, emotions and attitudes. Umberto Eco (2003, 107) notes in *Mouse or Rat? Translation as Negotiation* that "[t]he difficulties for the translator are due to the fact that . . . [the] word does not have the same evocative impact every time, in every culture or country". Sometimes, a descriptive rather than a literal translation might have been more appropriate but providing this would have interfered with the ease of reading. Choosing appropriate ways to translate might also mean selecting an interpretation of what was said rather than, as it is in the case of an original un-translated text, giving the reader the chance to make up their own mind about the meaning. In other words, translation is one amongst many factors within qualitative research that might affect interpretation. As Temple and Koterba (2009, 1) note, "All languages are internally differentiated and who translates influences the findings." When the most appropriate rather than the most literal translation was not becoming immediately apparent to me, I referred to a thesaurus and

chose words that in my mind had the closest equivalent usage in English. I often reread and changed my translations following feedback from my supervisor.

The problem with transcripts is further compounded by the necessity of trying to convey spoken language which is full of pauses, hesitations and false starts, and which presented in literary form might look untidy and inarticulate. There is a possibility that the quotes might even appear incoherent to those who originally voiced the words. Unfortunately, because of the limitations of this research, I was not able to contact the participants a second time and provide them with an opportunity to see the transcripts and clarify whether what they had said had been captured correctly.

Materials

During the interviews, I used as prompts quotes from sex advice books as well as magazines, which I have included in the Appendices. I also utilised some pictures, which are included in Chapter Seven. The selection of material for textual analysis was informed by what the participants identified as guiding their personal sexual learning. The overwhelming majority of participants mentioned the teenage magazines *Bravo* and *Bravo Girl!* as the major source of their sexual knowledge. The textual sample that I used was defined by what I managed to purchase on the Polish equivalent of eBay. Out of the issues that I acquired, I chose the following issues for the analysis: *Bravo Girl!* 1996, number 8; *Bravo* 1999, numbers 14, 18 and 22; as well as *Bravo* 1998, number 10. I chose issues from the late 1990s as I calculated that these would probably be the issues that my interview respondents would have read in their early teens at primary school age. I tried to select texts that represented as wide a range of formats and conventions relating to sex and relationships advice as possible.

Another textual source analysed in this study, the magazine *Charaktery*, could not perhaps be identified as a source material for sexual learning because it is a

publication not devoted to sex and relationships per se but is a popular psychology magazine directed at women. However, it is a contemporary material widely read by the audience demographics that my participants represent. I chose a specific article from the magazine because it represented an example of a uniquely Polish contemporary sex advice text. This text is devoted to a discussion of masturbation, which constitutes a topic not widely covered in the older texts, such as *The Art of Loving* that I have discussed in the previous chapter.

Data Analysis

The overall interview data set was analysed through thematic analysis according to the guidance of Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. I coded for as many potential themes as possible, highlighting, tagging and naming selections of the transcribed data set. The generation of initial codes was the next phase where I examined the data for both semantic (explicit or surface) and latent (interpretative and underlying ideas) content (Braun and Clarke 2006, 84). Following the preliminary coding, the code refinement stage took place where the large selection of developed codes was narrowed down, refined and grouped for more global underlying themes. At this stage some codes were discarded, some were incorporated within other codes and had their labels changed while some were identified for potential future use. As a result of this several major themes or meta-themes that also map well onto some of the topics of my interview inquiry, were identified as worthy of further and more in-depth thematic analysis on their own. These meta-themes included “sex education in Poland”, “sexualisation of culture in Poland”, “relationships’ satisfaction” and “feminist politics in Poland”.

What dictated the choice of analytic approaches in this study was the character of the data and analytic utility of the chosen approach for the specific set of data. The approach taken here is a qualitative, post-structuralist, feminist and critical analysis that draws upon analytical tools and concepts developed within discursive psychology (Wetherell and Potter 1988; Wetherell 1996, 1998; Wetherell and Edley 1999; Edley 2001), such as "subject positions", "interpretative repertoires" and "ideological dilemmas". These three analytical concepts pertain to the idea that what is being said during interpersonal interactions, such as interviews, is not only locally situated but also connected with extended socio-cultural contexts and shaped by available discourses. The discourses define speakers' identities by providing them with a range of "subject positions" and sense-making tools: "Once we take up a Subject position in discourse, we have available to us particular, limited sets of concepts, images, metaphors, ways of speaking, self-narratives and so on that we take on as our own" (Burr 2003: 145–146).

Interpretative repertoires are discursive resources or "systematically related sets of terms (Potter 1996) that can be recognized in the familiar and well-worn images that are known and understood through shared cultural membership" (Reynolds, Wetherell, and Taylor 2007, 335). A further, more detailed definition of interpretative repertoires is provided by Wetherell and Potter:

> We suggested earlier that discourse is variable in the sense that any one speaker will construct events and persons in different ways according to function. This is not to imply that there is no regularity at all in discourse – simply that regularity cannot be pinned at the level of the individual speaker. There is regularity in the variation. Inconsistencies and differences in discourse are differences between relatively internally consistent, bounded language units. . . In dealing with lay explanations the analyst often wishes to describe the explanatory resources to which speakers have access and to make interpretations about patterns in the content of the material. The interpretative repertoire is a summary unit at this level. Repertoires can be seen as the building blocks speakers use for constructing versions of actions, cognitive processes and other phenomena. (Wetherell and Potter 1988, 172)

The commonsensical explanations that speakers draw on and the self-accounts they construct for themselves and others are transient, contingent, shifting and often contradictory. The concept of "ideological dilemmas" captures this casting, recasting and conflicting nature of everyday accounts:

> The competing arguments and values which people draw on in making sense of their lives . . . linked with interpretative repertoires, since speakers work with the inconsistency in the repertoires they draw on and try to reconcile contradictory argumentative threads. (Reynolds, Wetherell, and Taylor 2007, 336)

The version of discourse analysis that deploys the above defined analytical tools and concepts assumes a constructionist perspective. This perspective on discourse analysis places an emphasis "on discourse as the vehicle through which the self and the world are articulated, and on the way different discourses enable different versions of selves and reality to be built" (Tuominen, Talja, and Savolainen 2002, 273). It recognises "that language allows for multiple versions of an event. . . . [It] does not assume that an individual will represent people and events consistently over time. Rather, an individual is expected to develop a variety of different representations or explanations, depending on the function performed by the account" (McKenzie 2005, 222). Furthermore, "the offering of explanations is not socially neutral, but is a rhetorical act, in the sense that it involves justification and criticism and the attempt by the speaker to persuade hearers of their interpretation" (Billig 1997, 42). In practical terms this means that talk and texts can be analysed in terms of how they orient to or take into account culturally available opposing argumentative positions.

The textual analysis of two sexual self-help resources in Chapter Five utilises selected analytical tools described in detail by Norman Fairclough (2003) in *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*. The critical framework developed by Fairclough is utilised by me for the examination of data in this study because it enables

me to explore what structural and rhetorical properties of texts are utilised by editors of popular magazines to bolster certain modes of representation. Power elites have special access to discourse: to discursive or communicative scope, resources and actions through access to positions, status or professional expertise (Van Dijk 1993). Therefore, the sex advice professionals, including the authors of the texts analysed here, claim a privileged access to discourse and discursive production of knowledge over the readers, who in turn are positioned as recipients of discourses and their ideologies. Fairclough argues that this is because "media output is very much under professional and institutional control, and in general it is those who already have other forms of economic, political or cultural power that have the best access to the media" (1995, 40). Popular commercial magazines and other types of media are seen as likely candidates to be implicated in the reproduction of gender dominance and inequality. They are social texts, which function in specific ways and have intended effects. Another reason that I chose to utilise the tools and concepts described by Fairclough (2003) is their comprehensive utility, which allows the examination of more local aspects of language in order to determine how they are deployed to achieve certain rhetorical functions. These include grammatical mood, modality and speech functions, as well as "larger" linguistic concepts, such as assumptions, intertexuality and genres. These concepts and tools will be defined and discussed in context in Chapter Five.

Although the aim of this study, inherent in its context and the scope of the data, is not to follow faithfully any specific discourse analytic tradition, the focus here is *discourse* itself, rather than desire to unravel "some reality which is deemed to lie behind or beyond the text " (Gill 2009, 351) or talk. Interpretative repertoires are units of analysis that within some discourse analytical traditions would be defined as discourses. Discourses, however, broadly speaking, are more unitary, singular and encompassing entities that map onto particular domains, for example, consumer

discourse or as in this study, the romantic love discourse. The deployment of the term interpretative repertoire allows for the exploration of dynamism and change and "leaves space analytically for processes of articulation (and dis-articulation and re-articulation)" (Gill 2009, 351). Interpretative repertoires are "used by those who want to place more emphasis upon human *agency* within the flexible deployment of language . . . offering speakers a whole range of different rhetorical opportunities" (Edley 2001, 202, emphasis in original).

Some Methodological Considerations

Poststructuralist theories posit that meaning is constituted through language and inherent to this understanding is the view of interviews as "social productions" where:

> respondents are better seen as narrators or storytellers, and enthographers are cast as participants in the process. Working together, the interviewer and narrator actively construct a story and its meaning. Interviewing, then, is inherently collaborative and problematic. (Miller, Manning, and Maanen 1995, vii)

Speakers' identity work is often co-constructed by their subjective expectations of the researcher's agenda as well as by her questions. What is disclosed and remains undisclosed by the interviewees is subject to the will of self-presentation – each of the respondents performs "rehearsed identity work" (Taylor 2005).

As was previously discussed in relation to informed consent, the participants' motivation for taking part in research, their perception of their own role and the role of the researcher as well as the nature of the research, all constitute factors that shapes their narrative accounts. Another important consideration is that, in trying to make research feminist and political, researchers might over-interpret or misinterpret the participants' words or simply put their own words in participants' mouths. As Ann Weatherall and colleagues point out:

> we often "take" women's (and men's) words and interpret them in ways that suggest discursive influences on subjectivity that our participants themselves may not "own". . . . Sometimes, we are aware that our interpretations might seem to have little direct value or relevance to the lives of our participants. (Weatherall et al. 2002, 533)

Here, there is also a danger that our interpretations may be patronising, dismissive or implicitly critical of our participants. The dangerous dichotomy between wanting to see our participants either as self-defining and autonomous individuals or, if they do not subscribe to "our" feminist story, the dupes of ideology, is another dilemma inherent to ethnographic interpretation. Neither of the two extreme ways of viewing participants supports the understanding of how certain ways to perceive the world around us become more dominant than others and how change can be effected. The notion of a freely choosing and autonomous subject is narrow and inflexible. As Rosalind Gill points out, it offers a too unified, rational and deliberative view of the self with no space for contradictions and splits.

> This model of choice eschews psychological complexity by refusing to address how power works in and through subjects, not in terms of crude manipulation, but by structuring our sense of self, by constructing particular kinds of subjectivity. It avoids all the important and difficult questions about the relationship between the psychic and the social or cultural – how it is, for example, that socially constructed ideals of beauty or sexiness are internalized and made our own? (Gill 2007b, 76)

To address this problem, Gill (2007b, 77) proposes a research orientation which she defines as "critical respect". Critical respect here does not mean that in trying to position the participants' accounts I wish to dispense with respect because, as Gill stresses, respect is "axiomatic to feminist research". The critical respect research orientation, however, goes beyond respectful listening and – whilst not forgoing the right to engage critically, interrogate and question – it aims to contextualise the stories and by placing them within wider context, it examines also the patterns, variabilities,

exclusions and silences within them. It is based on the understanding that – whilst there is more than one story to be told – situating an individual's account does not involve elevating the feminist researcher's account above other accounts. "[It] starts from the proposition that we are *all* enmeshed in these matrices of power" (77, emphasis on original). Trying to understand more about how this power operates is the ultimate goal of feminist research and if we presume that the participants' stories are multiple, situated, unstable and possibly contradictory we afford ourselves more chance to see how change occurs. As Mary Gergen and Sara Davis (1997, 56) point out quoting Herniques et al. (1984, 219), "It is possible, therefore, not to deny desires which may be incompatible with liberation, 'but to understand desires as produced and therefore, potentially at least, as changeable'."

Conclusion

This chapter has set out the methodological framework for this research project and the ways in which it was implemented. I started by reiterating my research questions and followed this by discussing the practical aspects of data collection including the recruitment of participants, the procedure and the materials used. I described data analysis approaches that I deployed for the examination of interview data and textual data. I have emphasised that I deployed selected tools and concepts developed within discursive psychology as well as the textual approach defined and described by Fairclough (2003) in order to support not only my critical but also specifically feminist informed analysis of the data that I had collected. In this chapter, I have also discussed the rationale behind choosing the appropriate research methods as well as described the practical challenges I encountered in the process of data collection. The next chapter is the first analytical chapter of this thesis devoted specifically to a text analysis of two Polish sexual self-help sources: a contemporary popular science

magazine for women entitled *Charaktery* and post-1989 archival issues of the teenage magazines *Bravo*.

Chapter Five

The Art of Loving

Introduction

During the interviews that I conducted, I asked my participants about textual sources that they used in order to expand their knowledge about issues of sex and relationships. This chapter involves a text analysis of two selected sources of sex and relationship advice, one of which was identified by the participants as the texts that supported their sexual learning. This source was *Bravo* and *Bravo Girl!* magazines which constituted new, unconventional, if not sensational, publications that the informants and their school peers explored in their early teenage years. I will explore selected texts from *Bravo* and *Bravo Girl!* magazines later in this chapter.

The first text analysed here from the magazine *Charaktery* (Characters, Makulska-Gertruda 2008), although not mentioned specifically as a source for sexual learning by my participants, is a contemporary publication aimed at the target audience that they represent. The chosen article contains a discussion of the changing landscape of sexual relations in Poland, something that my participants frequently talked about. The aim of this work in broader terms is to explore how young women in Poland position themselves within the dominant discourses of female sexuality and the analysis would not be complete without the exploration of the texts that are the carriers of these discourses. The text analysis included in this chapter also provides an opportunity to explore and bring closer the unique field of sex advice in Poland to an English reader.

The texts analysed here are positioned within a long-standing tradition of self-help whose implied audience is women. Instructing women about a variety of subjects, such as child rearing, home economics and relationships, constitutes a long established

social practice. As the back cover of the book by Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English illustrates:

> *For Her Own Good* boldly reassesses 150 years of advice from the experts: gynaecologists and child psychologists, sociologists and psychoanalysts (including Freud), home economists and paediatricians (including Spock). Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English show how the experts usurped women's age-old skills and then set themselves up as the sole authorities on everything from work to love. The onslaught of advice that followed has always been justified as being *for her own good* – a service to women badly in need of guidance. In fact that "scientific" guidance has again and again contained arrogant and unscientific judgements about women's body, mind and nature. (Ehrenreich and English 1979, emphasis in original)

The texts directed at women often are characterised by an explicit commercial goal as well as an imperative grammatical mood, such as this text from an advertisement for *Palmolive* soap entitled "Will your husband marry you again?" from 1921:

> Beauty's basis is pure, mild, soothing soap. Never go to sleep without using it. Women should never overlook this all-important fact. . . . The skin contains countless glands and pores. These clog with oil, with dirt, with perspiration – with refuse from within and without.

In other texts, the commercial objective might be less overt. Their apparent purpose might be to advise rather than sell and they might not use the imperative grammatical form, such as the text below from an article about oral contraception in the Polish *Panorama* magazine:

> It transpires that as many as 80 per cent of women do not know that if they forget two pills in a row, they need an additional protection. In the case of the contraceptive patch, a woman might not notice that it has peeled off. (Prasełek 2012, 61)

However, what the two texts above, as well as the texts that will be analysed below, have in common, is that ideologies of persuasion are hidden under what appears to be well-meaning, kindly advice that is directed predominantly at women, rather than men.

Not only are women deemed as responsible for the sustaining of their husband's commitment to their marriage or working out the pitfalls of contraception, they are positioned as naive, unknowing and needing to know (Farvid and Braun 2006).

The Legacy of *The Art of Loving*

The key figure in Polish sexology is Michalina Wisłocka (1921 – 2005), who is the author of the prominent sex manual *The Art of Loving* (1976) and who, as I already mentioned, is said to have taken socialist Poland out of the dark ages in terms of knowledge about sex. The appeal of Wisłocka's work lies perhaps in its accessible language and approach, which unlike the more formal tomes authored by other sexologists, is full of anecdotes, personal stories, and case studies which help to translate sexological knowledge into everyday practice and application. I conclude this introduction to the field of professional sexology in Poland with a discussion of Wisłocka's text because it constitutes an important backdrop for the analysis of the two other texts that are the focus of this chapter.

As a literary or discursive genre, the book spans different conventions – defined by Fairclough as genre mixing (2003, 34) – from more formal clinical sexology that is evidenced by the use of many diagrams, drawings and references to biological or physiological features and functioning, to the popular self-help tradition, where the language is informal and claims are illustrated by anecdotal evidence, case studies and references to other non-medical literature. The text is aimed at advancing sexual knowledge and educating women and men in Poland on how to form and sustain satisfying heterosexual relationships. The format of the book allows the author to fully discuss different aspects of sex, sexuality and relationships, as well as fully developing the leading argument, unlike for example an agony aunt letter, where the space and context does not permit this. One of the main reasons for marital dissatisfaction

identified by Wisłocka is the lack of vaginal orgasm in women and the book includes a detailed description of the problem as well as the remedy that has been developed by the author. Wisłocka was a practising sexologist with her own clinic and identifying the effective treatment for a lack of orgasm during genital intercourse for women was a landmark in her career.

Wisłocka's text is embedded within the discourses of heteronormativity, male sexual drive (Hollway 1984) and the coital imperative (Jackson 1984). The role of a wife is to provide an emotionally and sexually satisfying relationship by facilitating regular participation in intercourse. For example, addressing the issue of when it is appropriate for a married couple to start having sex, Wisłocka argues: "The couple in love should not begin with intercourse because the man is fully mature physically and capable of the correct sexual experiences, whilst a woman is only starting her erotic education" (121). Although the male sexual need for frequent coital sex is not explicitly discussed by Wisłocka, she frequently refers to failure and the "tragedy" of marriages where a woman participates in coital sex out of duty. It is also her use of the template of male sexual readiness for coital intercourse into which women should fit that positions Wisłocka's account within the discourse of the male sexual drive. Female sexuality is defined and awakened by a man and in the context of a long-term heterosexual relationship. A woman here is a second sex in the sense that her sexual identity is legitimised by her male partner. Furthermore, coital intercourse is the only true and correct sexual activity and the goal of all sexual expression. Thus, within the hegemony of the coital imperative the associated cognition (Fairclough 1992) equates sex with genital intercourse and the discursive and social practice that "makes it unthinkable that mature heterosexuals could have sex without having intercourse" (McPhillips, Braun, and Gavey 2001, 229). Other activities, such as petting, are

preparatory or preliminary or, like masturbation within marriage, become undesirable. Sex is essentially heterosex, no other sexual orientation is mentioned in the book.

At the same time, the discourses similar to the have/hold discourse (Hollway 1984) that deem marriage and motherhood as the ultimate conditions for a woman's personal and emotional fulfilment are the main discursive framework upon which the text is built. Wisłocka, for example, on only one occasion and relatively briefly discusses female masturbation:

> Sexual drive of girls between twelve and sixteen years of age is relatively minimal and therefore the excitability is also low. The underdeveloped sensitivity of sexual receptors (skin, nipples and genital area) results in a modest desire for sexual excitement. This "physiological underdevelopment" of sexual responsiveness is compensated for by the fast and intensive development of emotionality that is manifest by the desire to search for a boy "for keeps". Masturbation in the presence of low sexual drive occurs at this age much less frequently than in boys and it amounts to twenty per cent. Girls under the age of sixteen embark on sexual intercourse under the pressures from boys and do not reach sexual satisfaction. (27)

In other words, young women in Poland do not frequently masturbate because their sexuality is underdeveloped and therefore they possess low sexual drives. According to Wisłocka, the sexuality of a woman develops gradually in the context of marriage. Furthermore, sexual activities of single, unattached individuals are discussed within the context of only one possible scenario involving a minority of young, irresponsible, emotionally immature but highly over-sexualised and promiscuous people. These types of sexual activity is explicitly condemned:

> Young people who embark on sexual encounters before the age of sixteen when they have not yet learned to establish friendships and emotional bonds with another human being treat sexual intercourse as a pleasure on a par with eating a cake, smoking a cigarette or going to the cinema. Sexual intercourse for them is an aim within itself and it is not embedded within the overall emotional life of these young people. As the result of this kind of attitude, the frequent changes of partners that take place can lead to the Don Juan syndrome or nymphomania (I do not mean the sexual deviation here but merely the collecting of sexual intercourses without the emotional bonding). (116)

Given this reductive and negative understanding of sexual activity outside long-term relationships I was interested to uncover if and what might be different in more contemporary texts that emerged in Poland after the systemic transformation. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to textual analysis of extracts from the two selected texts, *Charaktery* and *Bravo*, applying selected analytical tools and concepts developed by Norman Fairclough and described in *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research* (2003). I chose the text from the magazine *Charaktery* for analysis here because it is a contemporary resource aimed at women in their twenties, and singleness and masturbation are, unlike in *The Art of Loving*, the main focus.

Charaktery: A New Take on Female Masturbation?

As mentioned in the methods chapter of this thesis, the magazine *Charaktery* is a popular psychology magazine founded in 1997, aimed at young educated women in their twenties or thirties. The magazine is embedded within the discursive practice of print media in Poland. The discursive practice in this context pertains to the "processes of text production, distribution, and consumption, and the nature of these processes varies between different types of discourse according to social factors" (Fairclough 1992, 78). In other words, the magazine as a text is defined and restricted by its format as well as the dynamics of publishing, distributing and merchandising. The magazine is one of a huge number of titles within the diverse market of women's magazines in Poland, and alongside the Polish edition of *Psychologies* magazine, or *Bluszcz* (Ivy) magazine which reprints fragments of popular foreign and local literature, *Charaktery* constitutes the sophisticated end of the market where emphasis is on long literary articles rather than glossy visuals, advertising and beauty tips. Although colour photographs and visuals are present in the magazine they fulfil a secondary and

illustrative function to support the texts. The magazine is moderately available, mostly within larger print media outlets, such as the popular chain of media stores called *Empik* (the Polish equivalent of *Borders* stores). Like Wisłocka's text, the magazine is embedded within what could be described as a sophisticated but popular self-help genre. The myriad of aspects that affect the sphere of sexual relations are one of main topics that regularly feature in the magazine. For example other articles within this topic include one about how to cope with marital infidelity, another advising what to do if either of the partners are not interested in sex and an article about "the fourth sexual orientation" that consists of people who are not interested in sex at all. The magazine is divided into sections, such as "The Theme" (which consist of the articles devoted to the issue's leading theme), "Psychonews", "Behaviours", "Family", "Persons and Personalities", "Health", "Psychology in the World" and "Lamplighter" (devoted to letters and answers). The article analysed here is in the "Behaviours" section (October 2008, 30–32).

The chosen article is entitled "Ona Kocha Się Sama", which constitutes a rhetorical double meaning that can be translated as, "She Makes Love to Herself" or equally it could be translated as, "She Loves Herself". It is written by a Polish psychologist, Ewelina Makulska-Gertruda, who is based in Germany and who specialises in the pathology of sexual relations. The author's credentials place the article within the tradition of medical science or clinical sexology, where people are defined as patients and the issues they face are framed as dysfunctions or even pathologies. Therefore, in this text, as in the text by Wisłocka, there are elements of genre mixing.

The text begins with a short introductory paragraph written using a large typeface:

> If not a long-term partner, not love affairs and one-night stands, then what? Solitude? The bothersome unrelieved tension, arousal, sleeplessness, back pain, irritability, low concentration levels. Maybe masturbation? This is a choice of 10 percent of women.

The above summary that follows the title and introduces the article, reveals that the discursive action that the article performs is to inform, provide food for thought supported by some interesting statistics but it is also to educate or alert the readers about the potential issue or problem they might be facing themselves. Therefore, the purpose of the action is both communicative, designed to arrive at common understanding, and strategic, directed at achieving a result; for example, for any person who identifies herself as affected by the problem to seek professional help.

The generic structure of the article follows the characteristic self-help pattern with some exceptions. The article is divided into titled sections. The first section introduces the overall dilemma, illustrates it with a "real-life" indirectly quoted and anonymised case study, followed by words of expertise in the form of direct quotes from famous Polish sexologists, that are further supported by empirical research and statistics. The later sections follow the same pattern with each section devoted to a sub-dilemma or another manifestation of the main problem. What distinguishes this from Wisłocka's text, is the lack of an immediate provision of a solution. This is a knowledge exchange oriented text, with a strong author's commitment to objective truth which again is substantiated by a rhetoric of scientific expertise, case studies and frequent references to statistics:

> In the *Encyclopaedia of Erotica*, Professor Lew-Starowicz states that during adolescence this phenomenon [masturbation] is almost universal. It can be

> observed in 90 percent of boys and 60 percent of girls. In later life, after engaging in sexual intercourse, masturbation does not go away.

Given Wisłocka's disregard of masturbation, the focus of the article appears as a welcome change. Masturbation is presented as universal and not as something that only maturing or unattached people engage in. However, a deeper look inside the text reveals that despite the apparent focus of the article being female masturbation, as evident in the title of the article, the ideological objective of the text is the promotion of coital sex. This objective is manifest in the organisation of the text, where the bulk of the discussion is devoted to masturbation but only in the context of a comparison with sex with a man, or more specifically with penis-in-vagina intercourse. Despite the acknowledged universality of masturbation, the text's latent message is that "ideally" coital sex should lead to the elimination of this problematic, if not sometimes, pathological practice:

> "It is a week since they had sex – last Saturday, in fact. Four years ago, when they first met, they had sex at least once a day (…). In those early days they would have ridiculed the possibility of intercourse only once in a whole week. Now, once a week had become more and more common." – this is a fragment of the famous *Sperm Wars* by Robin Baker, an American sexuality researcher. For the protagonist described by him, after many years of marriage the whole process of intercourse "was uncomfortable, even marginally painful, and almost totally unrewarding." From the further pages of the book it transpires however that the desire of the protagonist was only dormant. It was suddenly awakened after meeting an old flame. It was

> awakened and took her to the heights of erotic madness. The memories of this man "kept her in an almost permanent state of subliminal excitement", "and on visiting the toilet she masturbated" [Baker 1996, 6, 10 and 40]. . . .
>
> Unlike in men, where ejaculation and the orgasm that accompanies it are innate, in women, the ability to experience orgasm is acquired. In other words, a woman needs to learn sexual satisfaction. And she can learn it by getting to know different techniques that lead to orgasm. Which of them are, from the statistical point of view, the most successful?

In the section above, the vital difference between women's and men's orgasms are presented as scientific facts, which is evidenced by the use of factual statements written in a declarative grammatical mood ("are innate", "is acquired") or obligational mode ("needs to learn"). Readers should take the scientific "facts" presented by the author at face value. These declarative and obligational statements can be distinguished from statements that are characterised by lower degrees of certainty and commitment to truth and might use modal forms such as "may" and "could". Modality pertains often to "[h]ow one represents the world, to what one commits oneself, e.g. one's degree of commitment to truth, [. . . and] how one identifies oneself, necessarily in relation to others with whom one is interacting" (Fairclough 2003, 166). Although one of the claims of the article is the innate nature of male orgasm, and the lack thereof in the case of women, the particulars of how women "learn" orgasm and the nature of the automatism of the male orgasms remain opaque. Considering the multitude of discourses on female orgasm and the controversy around the different possible types of female orgasm, the lack of definition for the term could be considered a non-standard conversational implicature (Fairclough 2003), that is, the strategic avoidance of

explicitness. Does the author mean vaginal orgasm or clitoral orgasm, during coital intercourse or through self-stimulation?

The reader also remains uninformed as to exactly how the process of learning satisfaction is going to occur. The article mentions different techniques for achieving orgasm, some more successful than others and the reader can infer that some of these techniques are different techniques of self-stimulation. However, the account becomes confusing at this point, as the reader is not sure if the need to learn in the article refers to the physiological mechanism of arousal that leads to orgasm that a woman has to occasion (and the earlier reference to the automatism of the male orgasm suggests this) or is it that she simply needs to get to know the techniques that lead to orgasm. In other words, if men are capable of experiencing orgasms automatically, what is the exact nature of the process that brings about orgasms in women? The assertions about the acquisition of the ability to orgasm are presented as facts but they remain unexplained. The article continues:

> [P]hysiological reactions, contractions that are associated with female orgasm are most intensive during masturbation and last longer than those that are the result of sexual intercourse. But for the ultimate sense of satisfaction from orgasm in women other needs also play a part and some of them only their partners can fulfil. These include for example, the need for security or the sense of the deepening of emotional connection with the partner.

In the above extract, one important "value assumption", understood here as an assumption "about what is good and desirable" (Fairclough 2003, 55), is made. This assumption constitutes the central rhetorical message of the text and it stipulates that the

presence of the partner is needed for "the ultimate sense of satisfaction from orgasm in women". The assumption is passed off as a scientifically and statistically supported, and therefore indisputable, fact. Further in the text, the harmfulness of masturbation becomes more explicitly emphasised:

> In the course of human emotional and sexual growth as time progresses the process of conditioning brought by the frequent repetition of actions that result in pleasure plays the increasingly significant role in sexual reactions and behaviours. The conditioning of certain reactions, for example through the frequent repetitions of fantasies and somatic stimuli that accompany masturbation, sets a characteristic code. Sometimes this code becomes inbuilt to such an extent that the sexual reactions take the correct course only when the range of sexual stimuli occurs in the planned and synchronised fashion that fits this established code. Any deviation from the "stereotypical" course can suppress and distort sexual reactions.
>
> And this is what happened in the case described here. The sexual reaction code of the 23-year-old patient relied on highly specified factors, fantasies or somatic stimuli that constitute high demands for a man. It is very difficult or almost impossible for another person to recreate this encoded script. . . .
>
> Many women do not trust contraception. Many take the defensive stance towards marriage, treating it like an obstacle in the process of self-realisation. Some women are afraid of intimacy, which makes emotional relationships impossible. These and other conditions can lead to the situation in which a woman more often is inclined to choose masturbatory

> behaviours as safer, easier, more accessible and more physiologically satisfying than the risk-prone sex with a man.

The text could be perceived as an attempt to provide a fresh appraisal of female masturbation in the view of a changing cultural and historical context where not only some alternative discourses of masturbation are becoming increasingly available but also the attitudes towards long-term relationships as the most desirable outcome are transforming. However, conversely, the explicit message of the *Charaktery* article about masturbation is that a woman achieves the ultimate sexual satisfaction within a lasting heterosexual relationship. This message is conveyed despite the article's acknowledgement of the increasing trend in Poland for women to remain single. This trend is portrayed as unfortunate. Sexual behaviours outside the usual heteronormative framework are constructed as a negative outcome of changing times in Poland, where "since 2002, within a 14-year span, the percentage of people getting married and the number of families with children decreased and the number of people living alone increased." Therefore, the article draws on the local discourse of moral concern around low birth rates interpreted as a threat to national survival (LaFont 2001). Those readers of *Charaktery* who even as much as consider transgressing patriarchal hegemony by considering any other option than long-term monogamous heterosexual relationships, where ultimate intimacy is achieved through coital intercourse, are forewarned with the prospect of loneliness and unhappiness. In other words, what is desirable according to the text is sexual satisfaction that is associated with sex in the context of marriage and specifically coital sex and what is undesirable is singleness that denotes loneliness, masturbation and hence, the lack of sexual enjoyment.

A deeper look into grammatical features of the text reveals that the article is infused with a contradictory array of evaluative meanings. Firstly, they are manifest by

framing coital intercourse as “the source of the greatest pleasure” and masturbation as “conditioned behaviour” in the section titles. This is achieved by the combative use of the words such as “the greatest” and “pleasure” against the title that connotes an undesirable characteristic. Secondly, the dominance of the assumed positive aspects of sexual behaviour over the negative ones is achieved by the careful organisation of the text as a whole. Masturbation is positioned in the first section as an increasingly prevalent phenomenon. However, in the second and third sections that constitute a larger part of the text, it is then described as an emotionally deficient sexual activity that might lead to the establishing of harmful habits amongst solitary and unmarried people. Finally, the last section returns briefly to what might be understood as the original point of the article, stating that negative myths about masturbation should be dismantled because they might contribute to some negative psychological effects in people who masturbate. Despite the objective of the text being to enhance the knowledge and debunk the myths about female masturbation, the overall effect is the opposite.

In the middle sections of the text, masturbation becomes firmly established as a lacking, undesirable and lesser alternative to the more desirable outcome of sex with a male partner. It is emotionally void and therefore incomplete. It is a practice pursued by many modern “singles” who “lonely and concentrated on themselves often do not know how to enjoy sex”; concentrated on themselves and therefore selfish. Furthermore, not only do heterosexual intercourse and masturbation seem to be presented as mutually exclusive activities but the conditioned learning that is developed during masturbation is understood as precluding the enjoyment of coital sex.

As with many other self-help texts, in this article the social relation between the reader and the author is ideologically framed as the relation of solidarity oriented to help at least in enhancing the reader’s understanding. This text represents a popular science genre, rather than for example a medical textbook category, and its aim is to entertain

first and only then provide some food for thought. However, by being an instance of a self-help text characterised by a strong commitment to scientifically established "truths" and embedded within a long chain of self-help texts aimed at women, this text should be understood as representing the relation of power and social hierarchy. The author is a trained expert whose words are supported by a few other professional experts, whose knowledge is scientifically legitimised as objective. The orientation to difference (Fairclough 2003) is closed: the attempt to resolve the difference can only be fulfilled by the reader accepting the writer's understanding, which happens to be in agreement with all the quoted opinions of other experts. In other words, no alternative or contradictory explanations or accounts are possible according to the article. Furthermore, because many of the presented "truths" are implied to have biological or physiological origin, the legitimisation of the author's claims is established by the reference to the authority that possesses insider and professional knowledge of human biological functioning.

Let us consider the last paragraph of the text quoted here and imagine that the issue at hand is a less contentious matter rather than masturbation. We could assume that, as it is a "safer, easier, more accessible and more physiologically satisfying and less risk-prone" behaviour, it would only be common sense to engage in it and engaging in it would not call for the aid of similar elaborate yet contradictory rhetoric. The coincidental juxtaposition of "sex with a man" as an only truly emotionally fulfilling sexual activity against it also being a "risk-prone" behaviour reveals some logical contradictions that are inherent to the discourse of the coital imperative. Ultimately therefore, what this text shares with the text by Wisłocka is the emphasis on heterosexual coital sex as the source of ultimate sexual satisfaction that all women should aspire to achieve, despite it being risky and not the most physically enjoyable.

Female sexual pleasure is constructed in the article somewhat beyond the immediate carnal realm of experience that is usually described when talking about male sexual pleasure, which is a typical feature that this text shares with other texts (for example John Gray 1995; analysed by Potts 1998). They silence the notion of having sex to primarily meet sexual desire. It also places female sexual satisfaction somewhere outside the pleasure that could be reached through the stimulation of the most obvious organ of female arousal, the clitoris, thus simultaneously positioning sexual practises outside heterosexual relationships as less fulfilling and pleasurable. This is what Ann Ferguson (1984, 108–109) defines as the "primacy of intimacy" concept of sexuality, where "human sexuality is a form of expression between people that creates bonds and communicates emotion". This is juxtaposed against the "primacy of pleasure" theory, where "human sexuality is the exchange of physical erotic and genital sexual pleasure". Both women and men pursue and need harmonious heterosexual relationships but whereas in men emotional fulfilment is not possible without sexual satisfaction, women cannot achieve sexual satisfaction without emotional fulfilment. Therefore, the primacy of intimacy serves the dominant definitions of female rather than male sexuality because within male sexuality, genital physical pleasure remains the main objective.

Bravo and *Bravo Girl!*: The Discourse of Romantic Love

Bravo and *Bravo Girl!* magazines are very typical of the genre of teenage magazines that populate the shelves of many western countries. However, what distinguishes the Polish edition of *Bravo* from its western counterparts is the condition of social change into which it emerged. The magazine was created just after the fall of socialism and at a time when Poland entered the global market economy and many foreign products and influences flooded the country. The Polish edition of *Bravo* magazine was one of them; it was a copy of the German *Bravo* magazine modified to fit

within specific Polish market demands. The Polish *Bravo* magazine has the typical format of a teenage magazine with a high content of glossy colour photographs and pull-out posters of pop stars and celebrities. Every issue contains a photo-story, which depicts a romantic encounter, as well as horoscopes, a readers' letters section, pop song lyrics, crosswords and advertising content.

The production and distribution processes of *Bravo* take place within the discursive practice of print media in Poland and the magazine is available in probably all print media outlets. It can be found in the big chain stores such as Empik and little Ruch kiosks (Polish chain of small media outlets). As I will discuss in the next chapter, which is devoted to sex education in Poland, *Bravo* magazine constituted a vital resource for sexual learning accessed by many young people in Poland. As with the other text analysed here, the magazine represents a one-way mediated form of communication from editors to readers, however, with some implied communication from the audience to the creators as evidenced by the features of the magazines such as the readers' letters and "my first time" accounts. However, the readers' letters are edited using minimal language and following a typical and predictable pattern where age, sexual or relationship problem and how the reader is affected by it are listed in each letter in a similar fashion (Coward 1984). They represent the circumscribed example of the "problem-solution" framework (Fairclough 2003), which was typified in its fullest form by Wisłocka's text.

As discussed earlier in Chapter Three, commercial interests dictate the content of the magazines and *Bravo* is not an exception. Although the generic format of the text might suggest that, in terms of discursive activity, this is a knowledge and information exchange between the editors and the readers where free choice and individual preference is promoted, the commercial imperative inevitably restricts the content. This

occurs both in simple terms of the restriction of available consumer choices but also, more importantly, the prescriptive modes of behaviour.

Let me begin with the first extract that originates from *Bravo Girl!* (1996, no. 8, 12), "Love is… From a girl's diary. Pleasures and raptures":

> Hi Girls,
>
> There is a magical word that I'm thinking about when I recall my first experiences with boys. Orgasm. I wanted to experience it the first time I heard about it. I wanted to find out if it is really a special kind of pleasure. To start off with, I was disappointed. I was blaming my partner that he experienced orgasm and I didn't. This happened until the time when I understood that I made a mistake. Mutual kisses and caresses can be the aim in themselves and a woman learns to experience pleasure very slowly. Being able to experience it requires mutual closeness, understanding and lots and lots of love…
>
> Yours,
>
> Julia Bach

The author of the above text is constructed as a typical easy-to-identify-with girl. This is the relation of solidarity with the reader with the emphasis on commonality and consensus. The credentials of the writer are not given but the implication is that she writes from a vantage point of knowledge supported by first-hand experience. The producer of the text discursively constructs subject positions for themselves and for the implied reader. Specifically, the writer assumes an intimate relationship with the reader, setting themselves in the role of big sister or knowledgeable friend appealing to

the notions of female solidarity and sisterly community. Only one voice, the writer's voice, is included in the text but her experience is universalised. It speaks with the high commitment to objective truth on the behalf of many other women who have undergone a similar learning process. This is evident in the grammatical mood of the text is predominantly declarative where the majority of sentences are non-modalised statements of fact.

The author of the text negotiates the pertinent value assumption, "Is orgasm really important?" In the process, some familiar propositional assumptions ("assumptions about what is or can be or will be the case", Fairclough 2003, 55) are made: "female orgasm is learned and difficult to achieve", "male orgasm just happens", "assuming otherwise is a sign of inexperience" and "love is required to experience orgasm". There is also a juxtaposition of orgasm as possibly a "special kind of pleasure" against "kisses and caresses", although somewhat discursively positioned outside of pleasure, "can be the aim in themselves". These assumptions seek to universalise particular meanings around the "naturalness" of certain phenomena and "desirability" of certain behaviours. A woman's sexuality is a complex binary, the opposite of the male sexuality. It is more emotional and inevitably fulfilled only in the context of heterosexual love. Here again, the emphasis is on sexual activities that, although not the most physically pleasurable, are a source of other kinds of satisfaction.

What the above extracts have in common with the earlier analysed *Charaktery* text is the emphasis on essentialist gender difference specifically in terms of sexual arousal and the mechanism and experience of orgasm. Women are sexually complex, men are turned on at the "drop of a hat". Male sexual arousal and orgasm are reductively constructed as uncomplicated, always easily achieved and visually stimulated. Thus, the discourses around the complexity of female desire, pleasure and orgasm are a unifying feature of the texts analysed here and the dominant discourses of

sexuality at large. Juxtaposed against the effortless automatism of male sexuality, is the female sexuality: complicated, difficult to understand and requiring mastery on the man's behalf. Men who are good in bed know how to "bring their ladies to the boil" and give them orgasms. But the particulars of how this is done are forever constructed as a secret to be discovered. Panteá Farvid and Virginia Braun (2006, 304) in their exploration of the content of *Cleo* and *Cosmo* magazines talk about this "gendering of orgasm", where "realistically a man could come in 2 min" but a woman's orgasm is difficult to "achieve" resulting in the "difficult 'production' of women's pleasure by men".

The dichotomous constructions of female and male sexuality constitute a recurrent feature of the *Bravo* magazines that contribute to the coherence of its overall ideological message. They are visible across different texts in the magazine; for example, in this answer to the letter asking the recurring question, "Should I say 'yes' when he asks for the proof of love?" in *Bravo* (1999, no. 14, 14) "Write to Paulina: Difficult questions":

> Dear Ania,
>
> The age of fourteen is certainly not old enough to start having sexual intercourse. The body of a young woman is not yet ready for this, neither psychologically nor physically. Always, when one party has doubts (and you have them), it is better to say "no". Even under the threat of losing the partner. If he leaves you, it means that he does not really love you. Boys pursue sex because they experience the first intimate contacts very superficially; girls on the other hand – deeper and more seriously. The boy sooner or later will find another girl (I don't know a case when the love

> between fourteen-year-olds lasted many years and ended in a marriage), but his partner feels hurt, used and let down.

Reading the above extract, the reader might be left confused. She is compelled to pursue love and Ania above thinks that she has already found it but this is immediately devalued as the kind of love that will never end in marriage and therefore it is not a real kind of love. The authenticity of this love is also compromised by the fact that boys experience intimate contacts superficially and do not engage in them out of love. Thus, the gendered patterns of behaviour are narrow and predictable, leaving very little space for internal variation: girls are always naively and emotionally involved and boys pursue superficial and promiscuous sexual encounters. Here again, there is no lack of contradictions and while the body of young woman is initially not psychologically ready for sexual intercourse, she is then constructed as the one who experiences sexual encounters "deeper and more seriously". Experiencing sexual encounters deeper and more seriously is also framed as a potential reason for girls to avoid them. Therefore again, the feelings, emotions and outcomes that in other circumstances would be portrayed as desirable are here rhetorically discouraged.

True love, although considered the ultimate aspirational goal, within the *Bravo* narratives remains not only elusive and difficult to define but essentially heterosexual, for example as in the extract below from *Bravo* (1999, no. 22, 29), "Write to *Bravo*, Speak your mind":

> "I don't like affection"
>
> I am in the third year of technical school. I have many acquaintances and friends. Boys fancy me and everything is OK with the exception of one

thing that has become a great problem of mine. It is about my contacts with boys. Something is not right. I had a few boyfriends but I broke with each one of them after three or four weeks. To start off with everything was alright. I was under the impression I was in love until the boy attempted to kiss and hold me. Even when he held my hand I was feeling horrible. Despite the fact that I fancied the boy very much, I wanted to break up with him as soon as possible. Does this mean that I am not attracted to boys? Maybe I'm a lesbian? I'm increasingly stressed. I cannot understand myself. My female friends do not have this problem.

Ziula – 17

I think, Ziula, you should not be concerned. Finding somebody special is not easy at all. Often it happens that somebody appears very wonderful and handsome to us, but this is not enough to consider it love. Such a handsome guy on closer contact might turn out to be not very interesting and attractive. You are more demanding than your friends and therefore you are not interested in fleeting amours. I am very glad that you can say "no" to a boy. It makes no sense to force affection if this does not feel pleasurable. This does not mean that you have homosexual tendencies. Simply, you haven't yet met the one. You have to be patient. The true love will come for sure. Maybe very soon.

The feature that this agony aunt reply shares with many sexual advice texts directed at girls is the opaquely defined "readiness" for true love and sex. When does a girl know that she is really in love? How would true love manifest itself? How does

she know that she is ready for sex? The answers to these questions are not provided by the agony aunt. Furthermore, the possibility that the young woman might be a lesbian is completely discounted. Acknowledging same sex desire would call for a positive affirmation of the girl's feelings and experiences but instead the agony aunt pursues a negative tone of caution. Notably, what is a salient feature of the above *Bravo* extracts are the hypotheticals and predictions with causal, conditional and temporal semantic relation between clauses, such as "Always, when", "Even under", "If he leaves you, it means that" or "therefore you are not interested". They serve to bolster the author's claims by frequent and emphatic references to universal, predictable patterns and their inevitable consequences. These linguistic features are pertinent to the discourse of risk within sexual encounters that is so often aimed at the young female audience. Where it lacks the solid, practical and positive information regarding sexual matters and the mechanics of pleasure and arousal, it compensates with emphasis on the inevitably negative consequences and feelings of disappointment, loss and abandonment.

Indeed, as Sue Jackson (2005) argues, the questions regarding the readiness to have "sex" are a staple facet of agony aunt pages. The ambivalence about heterosexual desire thread through many of these letters and Jackson notes, quoting her earlier research from 2003 that "this notion of sexual readiness posed a difficult question for young women, one that established a great deal of circularity with no clarity as to what might determine such readiness" (302). Any doubts expressed in the letters are usually constructed as the sign of un-readiness. The responses that are embedded within the scripts of personal responsibility and sexual safety construct sex as dangerous rather than pleasurable.

The prohibitive tone of the agony aunt pages, however, gives way to a more affirmative tone in this account of "the first time" in *Bravo* (1999, no. 18, 15):

Krzysztof (18) talks about his first time:

"I was holding her in my arms"

In the evenings, at the bonfire, I played guitar for Ewa. We were like in a fairy-tale, the time was passing mercilessly fast. The last night arrived very quickly. We decided to spend it differently. We set the sail in the boat. The moon and stars illuminated in the undisturbed surface of the lake.

We were taken by a romantic mood. Ewa took my hand and our lips joined in a passionate kiss. We realised that tender caresses and kisses will not be enough. Slowly, taking her time, Ewa took her clothes off and I did the same. A pleasant shiver went down my spine, maybe because of the light breeze, or maybe it was a reaction to seeing her naked body inflamed by passion. She put her legs around me, we became one. We were taken over by a wonderful and difficult to describe emotion. We were making love for real! Finally, after three years of holding her hand, I had Ewa in my arms.

This is an affirmative account of positive experiences that accompanied sexual initiation. It is elaborate and flowery. It is written in a style that resembles the romance novel genre. This account draws on the scripts of romantic love aimed to appeal to female readers, showing that young men also aspire to have long-lasting and committed relationships where the long wait is rewarded because the connection is with that special person. At the same time, this account could be perceived as embedded within male-defined scripts of female sexual fulfilment. There is only one, directly quoted, voice presented, the voice of the male protagonist. The female protagonist is implied to experience pleasure but her voice is not included. Female pleasure is briefly and

abstractly described; however, it is formulated within the male sexual desire and the coital imperative understanding of sexuality. Sex is invariably the act of "becoming one". Here again, coital intercourse is constructed not only as a source of physical pleasure but also as a means to emotional connection.

Notably also, here and in other issues of this magazine that I managed to acquire, the accounts of "the first time" described in this section feature female and male protagonists who are 18 years old or older, although in most cases the reader can only presume that the accounts described are recent. The events described positively as the experiences that are fondly remembered are invariably described as long awaited but postponed. On a couple of occasions, "the first times" are unplanned, take place on a spur of a moment and with a casual partner. These occasions are described by the protagonists subsequently as something they are not proud of, wish not to dwell on or even want to forget. The positive narratives in this section, like the one by Krzysztof, can be, therefore, juxtaposed against the letter by Ania who was fourteen and deemed not ready or not in love enough to have sex. In Krzysztof's case, however, his age and patience warrant his readiness to embark on sexual intercourse. Thus, in the above *Bravo* scripts, the readiness remains vague and, considering specifically "my first time" stories, is indicated by being of a certain age or having waited for this event for some time.

Although in the above account, a young woman and man come together to finally consummate their love, the gulf between the presumed expectation of young female and male readers regarding their potential partners becomes the central feature of the following extract from *Bravo* (1998, no. 10, 16):

"Love & Sex '98"

Meet two people of your age. Kasia [15] goes to one of the trade schools in Warsaw, Kuba [16] attends an economic school in Gorzów. *Bravo* talked to each of them about very intimate matters.

- Kasia, do girls like to be picked up?

— Probably yes. I think they like when boys fancy them.

- And you, do you like when somebody notices you?

— Sometimes

- Why only sometimes?

— 'Cause it is not always fun.

- And when you don't like it?

— When a boy does it in a rude and rough manner.

- How should a boy pick up a girl for her to like it?

— He cannot be vulgar and pushy. It is nice when he is amusing, has a sense of humour and crazy ideas.

- Tell us, Kuba, what attracts your attention when you look at a girl you have never met?

— Hmm… Legs perhaps.

- And then?

— Then I try to rate her overall, I look at the face, hair… and return to the legs again.

- So how, according to you, a girl's legs should ideally look like?

— Not necessary slim but well-shaped and long. Well… with a nice arch at the ankle.

- Do you like when a girl wears a mini-skirt?

— Sure, I love mini-skirts and short dresses. But skinny, closely fitting jeans are also alright. They enhance the shape of the legs and allow for the imagination to run.

- Okay then, let's move to other parts of female body. What else, at the first sight, attracts you in a female shape.

— Hips, lips and breasts.

- Can we stop at breasts? Do you like small or large breasts?

— I like the medium size the most. I don't know much about it but I think "B" or a small "C".

The emphasis on biological differences between male and female sexuality that in turn impact on the varied sexual expectations between men and women was also manifest in the other text that I analysed here. While girls focus on the aspects of personality, boys are expected to have an attitude of surveillance, evaluation and objectification towards girls. However, what follows later in the extract represents an interesting and significant discursive shift and Kuba clarifies that the criteria and attributes that he looks for in women change with context:

Do you have a girlfriend?

— Yes.

- And what is she like?

— I find her attractive.

- What size are her breasts, medium?

— Rather small

- What mostly attracted your attention when you saw her for the first time?

— Her long auburn hair. It took my breath away.

- Only this?

— Well no. She also had something that attracted like a magnet. It is difficult to put a finger on it.

- Wait a minute, Kuba! You are not being consistent. Where are the legs, hips and breasts that you mentioned a while ago?

— Blimey, is that what I was talking about? Okay, in the theory it is different than in practice.

- Does this mean that when it comes to your girlfriend, these body parts are no longer so important?

— When I had a better look at her it turned out that the rest was not bad as well.

- And if the rest were not as perfect as you wished for?

— I'd still choose Monika. She is an exceptional girl.

This duality of expectations from a hypothetical woman and the woman you actually date was something that I also observed in another media source directed at young people. The previously discussed magazine *Filipinka* frequently featured the "Black Pages" section edited by a hypothetical Filip (Philip). In this section, young

Philip talked about the "male perspective" on heterosexual relations, clarifying the frequent gender based misunderstandings. This section could be perhaps treated as an early Polish equivalent of the "Inside his mind: Men reveal their secrets" *Cosmopolitan* articles. The following extract, written in the convention of a conversation between Philip and his male friend, also called Philip, originates from the sub-section entitled "Between Us, Philips":

> Philip, girls read about our conversations guided by a belief that they will find out WHAT WE THINK ABOUT THEM. They believe that they will find some guidelines – what a girl should be like in terms of personality, psychological characteristics and general manner. Philip, they are even willing to memorise it and, take my word for it, are prepared to devote the entire springtime to trying to master it. Dear Philip, I do not have to explain this MISUNDERSTANDING to you. You know when we think "GIRLS", then we do not really think but see and these visions are three-dimensional. (Filipinka 1979, no. 560, 17)

Later on, Philip explains that there is a difference between "girls" in plural who boys look at, evaluate and scrutinise and "the girl" or "the only one" who "we do not talk about", who has "personality, soul and heart" and remains inviolable. In other words, men have two sets of expectations and criteria: one for women in general and one for the special women in their lives. This notion of the dichotomy of men's interests helps to reconcile the discourse of men as visually turned on sexual conquerors with the contradictory discourse of monogamous romantic love.

Egalitarian Love or "Self-identity Through Other-centeredness"?

The romantic love discourse that has been appropriated to explain and justify all sexual behaviours is something that has been widely identified by the research studies around sexuality (for example, Gavey and McPhillips 1999; Holland et al. 1998; Willig 1998). Romantic love discourse dominates the media, art and literature.

In the British television series entitled *Don't Tell the Bride*, which also has a Polish

edition, where young men are bestowed with money and their partner's trust to organise their own wedding, all young brides-to-be are presented as uniformly longing for a white luxuriant wedding dress that would make them look "like a princess" and all young future grooms are clueless and hapless. Despite the initial challenges, difficulties and the different sets of exceptions between men and women at the end everything always falls into place. Indeed, this thesis illustrates that the romantic love imperative prevails despite the belief that different traits and expectations separate men and women. The scripts of *Bravo* magazines indicate that both women and men aspire to long-term, monogamous relationships and men also – perhaps after the period of initial sexual conquests – find their emotional and sexual fulfilment within the context of lasting romantic partnerships. Notably, this notion contradicts the premises of the have/hold discourse as it was originally set out by Wendy Hollway in 1984, which asserts that men are forcefully drawn into committed relationships somewhat against their own will and their masculine nature. More contemporary literature suggests that the picture of gender differentiated attitudes towards romantic relationships is more complex than the dichotomy portrayed by the have/hold discourse (for a review, see Langan and Davidson 2010).

However, considering self-help texts in general, as well as the texts analysed here, it is not difficult to see that the romantic love discourse is gendered and women are not only the primary recipients of self-help but specifically self-help that purveys a particular reading of the romantic love discourse. This gendering is not only manifest in self-help texts but also other media and Michelle Lazar, who studied the romantic love scripts of advertisements aimed at the increasingly career minded women of Singapore observed that within

> a narrative discourse of heterosexual sociality . . . , which is as 'compulsory' for women . . . as it is for men. Both are expected to follow the same 'stages' (viz.

> singlehood, couplehood, marriage and parenthood), and in the same chronology towards the ultimate goal of procreation. (Lazar 2002, 111)

Despite the above assumed symmetry of engagement, the mutuality and universality of the love discourse is targeted primarily at women. Within this discourse, romantic love occupies a centre position in a woman's life but it is merely a pragmatic solution for a man. In other words, the identities of a wife and mother are defining for a woman in terms of her value in society, whereas for a man the roles of a husband and father are just two amongst many other equivalent identities. Lazar defines it as "the achievement of feminine self-identity through other-centeredness". Lazar's study is especially relevant to my analysis of the text in *Charaktery*, for which the context was also the decreasing trends in the statistics of marriage and parenthood and the discourse of the re-inscription of women back into their traditional roles that I have discussed in Chapter Three.

The discourse of the romantic love that validates marriage, intimacy and sexual activity is not merely problematic because it is founded on presumed gender differentiated roles and expectations. As the proliferation of self-help texts can testify, despite its discursive ubiquity, the taken for granted love and intimacy as formulated by the mainstream discourse, is difficult to define and achieve (Langan and Davidson 2010). One of many factors that might contribute to this is the changing nature of employment where dual-career marriages are now common. Therefore, to support the intimacy and interpersonal satisfaction of romantic relationships requires a more sophisticated and uncharted division of tasks than those typically proposed by self-help texts, which routinely place responsibility on women for anything from "healthy moisturised skin of the little one" to "new sex trick for Valentines". This is also relevant to Poland where, as was discussed in Chapter Three, after the fall of socialism,

a dramatic rise in the childcare costs forced many women to remain in full-time employment.

However, the problems with the constructions of intimacy and happiness within romantic love span beyond the unequal division of tasks and are also located in a reductive understanding of the conditions and circumstances in which (inter)personal, happiness, fulfilment and intimacy can be achieved. Adrienne Rich (1989) in her critique of "compulsory heterosexuality" suggests that our ideas about intimacy are conflated with heterosexual romance and this dramatically restricts the ways in which we think about, and engage in, relationships with others. Looking at the texts analysed in this chapter this hegemony of compulsory heterosexuality can be defined as follows. A person, especially a woman, is happiest in a relationship. There is one special person out there for everybody. Relationships are happiest when they are heterosexual, monogamous and lasting. Relationships are happiest when the individuals involved are intimate. Intimacy means having sex with each other. Sex is penis-in-vagina intercourse.

The texts analysed above shared the common notion that coital sex equals intimacy. The *Charaktery* text universalised intimacy as a natural feature of penis-in-vagina intercourse by constructing it as activity that facilitates the "deepening of emotional connection with the partner". The universalisation of intimacy as a taken-for-granted feature of coital intercourse was further achieved by denouncing singleness and masturbation by constructing the women who remain single and masturbate as being "afraid of intimacy, which makes emotional relationships impossible". The notion of intimacy as achieved necessarily through heterosexual relating and engagement in coital intercourse is problematic because in all-or-nothing terms it excludes the possibility that intimacy might be experienced outside this context.

This construction of the role of intimacy in sexual relations is not a unitary discourse around the topic and a counter understanding of the relationships between sex and intimacy has been proposed. For example, Esther Perel believes that "desire and egalitarianism don't play by the same rules" and further illustrates her point:

> Ironically, what makes for good intimacy does not always make for good sex. It may be counterintuitive, but it's been my experience as a therapist that increased emotional intimacy is often accompanied by decreased sexual desire. This is indeed a puzzling inverse correlation: the breakdown of desire appears to be an unintentional consequence of the creation of intimacy. I can think of many couples whose opening lines in my office go something like this: "We really love each other. We have a good relationship. But we don't have sex." (Perel 2007, 23–24)

However contrary the above account is to the earlier understanding, it is still based on another all-or-nothing, reductive and simplistic notion of intimacy where there are no relationships that are both "warm and hot" and "hot sex" is reserved for strangers while "loving sex" always happens at home (Perel 2007, 208). I will discuss further the constructions of interpersonal happiness in Chapter Eight as well as consider them in relation to other topics explored in this thesis in the concluding chapter.

The above common-sense assumptions of the romantic love discourse are ideological and as Fairclough points out:

> Ideologies are closely linked to power, because the nature of the ideological assumptions embedded in particular conventions, and so the nature of those conventions themselves, depends on the power relations which underlie the conventions. . . . Ideologies are closely linked to language, because using language is the commonest form of social behaviour, and the form of social behaviour where we rely most on "common-sense" assumptions. (Fairclough 1989, 2)

Within the discourse where romantic heterosexual love and intimacy are universalised as sought after by everybody, the legitimate subjects are heterosexual, healthy, usually young – as the romantic love discourse rarely focuses on mature couples – and involved

in frequent coital intercourse. Furthermore, this discourse by defining for example penis-in-vagina intercourse as a "special kind of pleasure" undervalues and marginalises other sexual practices and the experiences of people who engage in them. Similarly, explaining a girl's lack of interest in heterosexual affection by not having "yet met the one" devalues homosexuality as a legitimate option. Furthermore, the notion that a woman sources pleasure from the emotional rather than the physical dimensions of sex and the associated understanding that orgasm is not the most important factor for her reinforce inequality in the sexual arena. Despite the emphasis on egalitarianism and equal rights to pleasure, these narratives privilege male pleasure because they do not construct an equivalent "doing without" for men and place the emphasis on the innate male sexual drive and the need to satisfy it through orgasm reached through coital intercourse.

The recurrent trope of completeness achieved through the merging of complementary traits points to the notion of "something missing" in the lives of people who are single. It undermines the possibility of ultimate happiness achieved on an individual level and in domains outside long-term monogamous relationships. Restricted possibilities of engagement within the heteronormative romantic love discourse are justified by biological traits possessed by the individuals involved. Biological determinism scripts are often mobilised further to support a reassertion of traditional family roles. The biological trait set for women alongside the understanding that women are driven by the emotional aspects of sex includes also the notion that women are more sentimental, sympathetic and caring, and therefore, more likely to find personal fulfilment in the spheres of home and motherhood rather than their occupational roles.

"A woman without a man is everything but only with a man becomes herself." This quote by a Polish satirist Władysław Grzeszczyk illustrates the dominance of

heteronormative romantic love discourse in Poland. The notion of a heterosexual, long-lasting and monogamous romantic relationship as the ultimate happiness goal is targeted at both women and men (Lazar 2002; Zaworska-Nikoniuk 2008) but as the above quote shows, a woman not only reaches happiness by having a man, she acquires selfhood. Without a man, she has lost out, she is pitiful and unfulfilled. She is a spinster. The equivalent term, bachelor, does not invoke the same negative connotations.

> Like witch, spinster was a scareword, a stereotype that served to embrace and isolate a group of women of vastly different dispositions, talents, situations, but whose common bond – never having become half of a pair – was enough to throw into question the rules and presumed priorities on which society was founded. (Haskell 1988, 18)

Notably, in Polish, spinster is translated as *stara panna*, for which the more appropriate translation is "old maid". *Stary kawaler*, "old bachelor", is also used but whereas *kawaler* is used on its own to denote an unmarried man of any age, the equivalent *panna* on its own becomes inappropriate, imprecise and unusual to describe an older unmarried woman, making it difficult not to use the negative "old maid". As the ethos of Polish Mother testifies, heterosexual marriage ultimately signifies motherhood because childlessness, like spinsterhood, denotes failure. Thus, sex is implicitly understood in terms of procreation and therefore as genital intercourse.

Conclusion

The first text analysed here, selected from the popular science magazine *Charaktery*, was devoted to the issue of masturbation as studied in the context of contemporary Poland. The text constructed this sexual practice as inferior and lacking by placing the emphasis on penis-in-vagina intercourse as the most emotionally satisfying sexual act for women. The text remains embedded within the powerful tradition of the coital imperative and, although women's masturbation is acknowledged

as an existing phenomenon and even a sexual activity of choice, it is still discursively pathologised. Female masturbation is firmly associated in the article with singleness and singleness in turn is associated with loneliness and the *lack* of a partner.

The archival teenage *Bravo* magazines upheld the ideals of sexual fulfilment in the context of romantic, special and long-awaited love. Mature and responsible love was juxtaposed against not being ready for sex or not yet being in true love. Although the criteria and expectations of girls and boys regarding the opposite sex differed, both genders were portrayed as aspiring to long-term romantic heterosexual relationships. Both of the selected textual sources fostered the idea of sexual activity beyond the mere satisfaction of sexual desire. Both texts were also embedded within the prevailing traditional discourse of romantic love and contained predictable sets of reductive and prescriptive constructions of happiness and (inter)personal fulfilment. While this chapter explored how the authors of popular sex advice texts understood satisfaction in sexual relationships, sexual pleasure and desire, the next chapter will turn to the interview data and focus on participants' own accounts around sexual experience specifically in the context of the acquisition of sexual knowledge.

Chapter Six

Sex and Relationships Education

Introduction

Narratives around sexual learning were one of the main topics explored in my research and to initiate the conversations that would facilitate the exploration of this topic, one of the opening questions of my interviews regarded sex education in schools. After the discussion of the challenges and pitfalls of sex education in schools, my interviews invariably progressed onto the topic of "the birds and bees" conversations with parents. In this chapter, I discuss the outcomes of these conversations, that is, I present an analysis of the participants' opinions about sexual learning in the context of Polish schools and homes. This chapter is the first chapter devoted to the analysis of my data following the framework outlined in Chapter Four, which utilises analytical tools and concepts, such as "interpretative repertoires", "ideological dilemmas" and "subject positions" developed within discursive psychology (Wetherell and Potter 1988; Wetherell 1996, 1998; Wetherell and Edley 1999; Edley 2001).

The Catholic Church is one of the principal political and cultural actors in Poland with a significant influence on the policies of the state, including those pertaining to sex and relationships education. After the fall of socialism in Poland, the new Solidarity government formed a powerful alliance with the Roman Catholic Church (Zielińska 2000). During the socialist era, the Church and Solidarity represented mass opposition to communism and since the change of system, both organisations have co-operated in promoting a return to the traditional family ideals of the pre-socialist era.

In 1993, to support this ideological imperative, the Law on Family Planning, the Protection of a Human Foetus and Conditions for Legal Abortion was enforced. This

statute soon became to be known as the Anti-Abortion Act (Psyk 2010). It contained the directive to introduce sexual education in primary and secondary schools, with the specific aim of decreasing the number of abortions by promoting sexual activity only within the context of heterosexual marriage, on the understanding that no pregnancy in this context is unwanted (Środa 2009). At the end of 1998, the clause mandating classes called, "Knowledge of human sexual life" was deleted. Instead, a new subject, called "Wychowanie do życia w rodzinie" (Preparation for the family life), was introduced and its objective was to teach about, "responsible and aware parenthood, the value of family, life in prenatal stages, as well as responsible and informed methods of procreation" (Sejm 1999, 1). The subject was, until recently, non-compulsory and parents were obliged to give a written agreement for their child to participate. However, as it was reported that parents were actively encouraged to sign opt-out notes during parents meetings and the school authorities presented a multitude of reasons why the lessons were inconvenient (Szpunar 2011), from September 2009 a new bill by the Minister of Education ruled that only these students whose parents *oppose* in writing to their participation in the lessons can now be excluded (Jasita 2010).

Despite the powerful role of the Roman Catholic Church within the politics of sex education in Poland, there are many discursive influences on the sphere of sexual learning that pose a challenge to the tradition of Catholicism and its understanding of gender or sexual roles. These influences include the socialist era originated notion of presumed gender equality, where the role of women as workers or students, rather than mothers, is often emphasised, as well as discourses of global neo-liberalism visible in the newly emergent media in Poland, that focus on female sexual activity outside the context of marriage. Feminism also, with its increasing recognition as an identity or political stance is perceived by many as standing in direct opposition to the ideology of the Church. An influential and frequently cited report about the failure of sex education

in schools in Poland that attributes this failure to the education bill introduced in 1993 by the Church aligned Solidarity government has been published by a feminist organisation (*Ponton* 2009).

The aim of this chapter is to present a critical, discursive, informed, qualitative analysis of young Polish women's accounts around issues that pertain to formal and informal sex education. The conversations I had with my informants explored aspects of sex education both in school and at home, as well as sexual knowledge acquired more informally via media and friends. The acquisition of sexual knowledge, therefore, became one of the major themes of the interview data set. The data subset that cohered around that topic was analysed to identify interpretative repertoires. The first four sections of this chapter discuss the interpretative repertoires (Wetherell and Potter 1988; Edley 2001) that I identified within these selected data. By interpretative repertoires, I mean recurrent themes, patterns and regularities within talk that can be registered across the accounts of different participants. Interpretative repertoire is an analytic tool that might be used by an analyst to support his or her aim:

> to describe the explanatory resources to which speakers have access and to make interpretations about patterns in the content of the material. . . . Repertoires can be seen as the building blocks speakers use for constructing versions of actions, cognitive processes and other phenomena. Any particular repertoire is constituted out of restricted range of terms used in a specific stylistic and grammatical fashion. (Wetherell and Potter 1988, 172).

In the sections five and six of this chapter, I explore how knowledge about sex and processes involving sexual learning are discursively constructed and how this in turn impacts on the ways that critiques of sex education are done discursively. In the last two sections, I also examine how participants positioned themselves and constructed their identities within the interpretative repertoires of sex education in Poland.

I identified four interpretative repertoires, namely, “sex education is a travesty”, “religious bias”, “bashful about the facts of life” and “missed opportunity”. The “sex education is a travesty” repertoire pertains to the understanding of school sex education in terms of its widely publicised fiascos. The “religious bias” repertoire associates sex education failures with the colonisation of the sphere of sex education by the Church. The focus of the “bashful about the fact of life” repertoire is the adult, often unacknowledged, embarrassment around sex talk. Finally, the “missed opportunity” repertoire, as its name suggests, constructs sex education in school and home as a missed opportunity because young people already possessed sexual knowledge that they acquired earlier through other means.

Transcription Symbols

Nina:	anonymised name of speaker
(A)	participant or group of participants recruited through student networking sites
(B)	participant or group of participants recruited through feminist discussion forums
. . .	text omitted within the sentence
. . . .	text omitted within the utterance
((laughs))	non-verbal actions or interruptions
[irony]	transcriber’s comments and clarifications
wor-	truncated, cut-off word
who- with whom	cut-off utterance

Sex Education Is a Travesty

Criticising sex education, especially in the context of the opposition to the Church's interference within this sphere, constitutes in Poland a form of established cultural practice. Although this type of criticism is not unique to Poland, in this country it is characterised by unique discursive features as it pertains to the debates about the identity of the state in the era of post-transformation and its place within modern Europe. The distinctive tropes within the talk about sex education in Poland identified here are unique not so much because of their recurring figures of speech but mainly because of their regular argumentative content and patterns in representations across interviews. Sex education in Poland is dismissed, or even mocked, in some specific and routine ways.

When asked about sex education in school, my informants talked about the lack and inadequacy thereof, that is, sex education in school being too narrow and having irrelevant and inappropriate content. The common characteristic of this repertoire was the use of illustrative examples of, "the worst possible scenarios" of sex education failures:

Extract 1

Renata: I remember that we did have some lessons but the teacher mostly talked about the fact that there was no need to shave our armpits yet, 'cause it's not such a big deal. (B)

Renata above describes the case of sex education instruction that was so off-topic that it could not have been taken seriously as legitimate sex education content. The teacher is presented as oblivious to this fact and Renata uses irony when she indirectly quotes the

teacher, to show that the teacher's words were delivered with utmost seriousness but were certainly not received as such. Renata, like many other respondents, points to the inappropriate "folk tales" quality of sex education instruction that was received by the students.

The participants uniformly expressed their belief that sex education in school was a matter that deserved more serious consideration. Often within "sex education is a travesty" repertoire the sex education content that was received, or more appropriately, not received, was juxtaposed against the structured, practical, relevant and to the point knowledge that the students expected:

Extract 2

Gosia: In my school there was no information. There was only in the primary school, in the sixth form some, "Preparation for family life" but this "Preparation"- there were no elements that dealt with what interests people at this age, none. (A)

Extract 3

Krysia: It wasn't useful and it wasn't down to the point because if we talk about sexual education that would, you know, encompass issues such as, you know, like body, sexuality, sexual behaviours, safety and so on and so forth, so it wasn't really sexual education by definition. (B)

Extract 4

Renata: The human reproduction probably, really dry out of the textbook, the human reproductive system. It almost said, "the female gives birth after nine

months." There were no details that could have been interesting from the perspective of young people, and that's it. (B)

Although relaxed sex education conversations about practical, interesting and applicable rather than biological aspects were emphasised, at the same time many responses stressed the need to take sex education "more seriously", formalise structure and extend its duration to resemble other subjects in the school curriculum:

Extract 5

Agata: Well, there were some, how shall I call it, talks, but this wasn't structured in a formal education kind of way. There was no sex education. . . . There was no sex education per se delivered at school by the teachers. (B)

Extract 6

Joanna: No concrete things, zero, and later it was simply cancelled after one term. It wasn't even a whole term but only a few hours. A few months it lasted perhaps and then it was gone. (B)

Some participants recalled the occasions when sex education was trivialised and relegated to the status of the unimportant by the school, which included, as I have discussed in the introduction to this chapter, encouraging parents to write opt-out notes:

Extract 7

Zofia: In my school for example in lyceum,[*] there were lessons about family life but our class teacher was encouraging everybody to bring a note from the parents, that they didn't give permission for their child to participate in these lessons, explaining during the parents' meetings that if they did, then we'd get an additional English or German lesson or maths or biology. (A)

Extract 8

Dagmara: "Preparation for family life" and such were taught by the biology teacher but I don't know, it was a slightly wrong moment, 'cause everybody was concentrating on their exams. Everybody was anxious that the exams were soon and everybody was in haste to learn history, geography or whatever they were going to sit, so nobody cared about "Preparation". (B)

Within the repertoire of "sex education is a travesty", my informants talked about how sex education was not only trivialised by schools but was also not treated seriously by the students. Sex education lessons were simply perceived as an occasion where formal school conventions were abandoned allowing students to "have a laugh":

Extract 9

Aldona: In gymnasium during tutorials there were some attempts at these topics with our class teacher. Well, he was trying to explain something about contraception, but we were such an age that we were turning it all into a joke. (B)

[*] In Poland, gymnasium is the name of the compulsory middle school that starts at the age of 12 or 13 and lyceum is a non-compulsory advanced secondary school that starts at the age of 16.

Extract 10

Monika: I remember in the primary school, some lady visited us exactly twice and she did not cover any details and presented it in such a way that the boys were roaring with laughter and she could not control it. (A)

Extract 11

Agnieszka: Boys joked at the prospect of it a lot and giggled and snickered about it. (B)

Although school was perceived as a major culprit responsible for the failures of sex education, the participants recognised that students also did not take sex education seriously. The organisation, timing and content of lessons were given as reasons but this interpretative repertoire was linked specifically to another discursive pattern that I identified as the "missed opportunity" repertoire, which I will discuss in more detail later.

Religious Bias

When sex education was talked about in terms of its inadequacy, the participants frequently identified this inadequacy as being the result of the religious bias within the existing sex education instruction. Religious bias within sex education, therefore, is closely related to the "sex education is a travesty" repertoire. Indeed, the narratives around religion-informed sex education could be understood as a feature of the "sex education is a travesty" repertoire because religious bias was one of the reasons why sex education was perceived as inadequate. However, because these narratives were embedded within the wider mainstream discourse of colonisation of the public sphere in

Poland by the Church, I decided to distinguish the recurrent patterns of talk around this theme as a separate interpretative repertoire.

As previously mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the Law on Family Planning and the Protection of a Human Foetus introduced in 1993 – termed the Anti-Abortion Act – contained in its original version, directives that would introduce sexual education to primary and secondary schools (Środa 2009). The aim of the statute was the reduction in the number of abortions in Poland by promoting sexual activity only within the context of heterosexual marriage and conversely, the birth control methods that are defined by the Church as "natural". The subject introduced in 1998 to fulfil this aim, the "Preparation for the family life", its scope and the name, were considered by the respondents as too biased to be a platform for the delivery of effective sex education:

Extract 12

Agata: The name itself, "Preparation for family life" is already stigmatising and defines the type of audience, doesn't it? (B)

My participants' narratives around the contents of sex education commonly described occasions when sex education lessons were reductive and purposefully hid the information that did not comply with the Church's ideological agenda. Therefore, sex education was a travesty, not merely because it was characterised by inappropriate content but specifically religiously bias content:

Extract 13

Krysia: I remember there was a funny situation and she [the teacher] was trying to introduce some information about contraceptives. And she was of course- she

did not want to get into, you know, medical stuff, the pills. She wanted to talk only about natural contraceptives. (B)

Extract 14

Dagmara: She drew a circle and then she drew another smaller circle and said that this is HIV virus and these are the holes in the latex and therefore condoms are bad. And that's how our sex education finished. (B)

Extract 15

Ola: Because I am bisexual and it was relatively difficult for me to accept it and during the sex education at school the issue of homosexuality was not touched on at all. (B)

Extract 16

Anita: In lyceum, however, during religious education we had something-some film about abortion and some such initiatives, a nun that had these lessons with us was trying to educate us somewhat about different matters. But it was all about premarital counselling because it was the last year of secondary school. (A)

As I previously mentioned, the "religious bias" repertoire is embedded within the wider discourse of the pernicious influence of the Roman Catholic Church in Poland. This discourse is manifest in many texts devoted to school and home sex education published in Poland. For example, the Polish feminist activist and columnist, Magdalena Środa (2009), critiques the sex education ruling and its main purpose to reduce the number of abortions by reducing sex to an activity that should only take

place within the context of heterosexual marriage. Środa discusses the report entitled "Jak Naprawdę Wygląda Edukacja Seksualna w Polsce?" (What Is Really Taught in Sex Education in Poland, 2009) by an alternative source of sexual education, the telephone helpline operated by a feminist organisation called *Ponton* (Pontoon). Środa argues that the array of problems encountered by the activists of the group reflects, "a lack of knowledge, curiosity and isolation," of young people as well as, "their great need and desire for knowledge and discussion about issues of sex and sexuality." (41).

The report by *Ponton* has been extensively quoted by the press in Poland with the articles describing extreme cases of biased instruction and the students' lack of knowledge regarding sexual matters. For example, a parodic piece entitled, "Niewychowanie Seksualne" – which could be translated as "Sex Mis-education" – inspired by student letters was published by the major Polish newspaper, *Gazeta Wyborcza* (Krzyżniak-Gumowska 2009). The article, like Renata in Extract 1, points to the "folk tales" quality of sex education in Poland and suggests that euphemistic scripts and pseudo claims to knowledge about body and sexual matters are a staple feature of sex education lessons. For example, a teacher is reported using the word "ham" when referring to female genitals and "sausage" when talking about male genitals. Further examples include female students being advised that they are too young to use tampons because this can lead to the loss of "the most important treasure that is virginity" (35) and male students being told not to use a condom because it can cause loss of the blood circulation, which might lead to impotence.

What was evident across the responses that invoked religious bias was the notion that religion-informed instruction should have no place in sex education because it is erroneous and reductive, or even regressive and backward. The "religious bias" repertoire invokes fear about the attempts by the Church to take away the relevant information and replace it with its own absurd, askew and repressive take on the issues

of sex and relationships. This repertoire resonates with the wider discursive notion that the Church exerts pressure to keep Poland back and the Church's interference in the public sphere, including the sphere of sex education, constituting a disgrace and embarrassment for Poland (Środa 2000, 2009). This influence was blamed, by some media commentators, for dividing Poland from other European countries by a "civilisation gap" (Psyk 2010). In its ambition to become a truly democratic and civilised state, Poland is compared by some Polish voices to other countries, such as the UK, where the tolerance regarding abortion or homosexuality – considered to be the two most pernicious aspects of religious prejudice – is understood as no longer the most pertinent issue needing to be urgently resolved:

> Igor says that finally he can converse not about homosexuality and abortion – as he used to in Poland – but about how the ideas developed within the science of economy can transform the lives of countries and their citizens for the better. (Polish student of Economics studing in the UK quoted on the online edition of the Polish *Newsweek*, Ozminkowski 2006)

Bashful About the Fact of Life: Adult Embarrassment

Parents were frequently mentioned by my participants as another source from which they expected to gain help in acquiring knowledge about sex. However, the conversations with parents about sex were uniformly constructed as problematic and characterised by the parents' reticence and lack of skill in delivering the information about sex. Idiomatic expressions that are characterised by metaphors and euphemisms, such as "facts of life" or the story of the delivery stork, often jokingly invoked in Poland, are used to avoid or conceal the embarrassment that is understood to constitute a natural part of the talk about sex. The subject of this interpretative repertoire is parents' and teachers' avoidance and their being unprepared to discuss topics around sex:

Extract 17

Justyna: Once when I was twelve I went to my mother and asked, “When are you going to tell me the facts of life?” and she said, “perhaps tomorrow,” ’cause she had some washing to be done or something. (B)

Extract 18

Renata: I remember that one of the most traumatic experiences was when I got my period for the first time and my mother almost pushed me into the bathroom and said- threw a pack of sanitary towels at me and said, “You should know how to use this,” and ran away. . . . And she also added that tampons were not for me, so I- I don’t know why not for me but not for me apparently. (B)

What characterises the narratives of adult incompetence in terms of sex education is the imperative and demand that adults should be the ones to inform young people about sex, followed by the denouncement of their abilities to do so. This criticism is delivered typically without acknowledging that sex talk is problematic or that sex education as a school subject – as it was pointed out by respondents within the “travesty” repertoire – is not organised in a similar fashion to other subjects on school curriculum. Thus, the commonsensical understanding around the acquisition of sexual knowledge, which recognises sex’s reputation as a taboo, remains unvoiced here. However, according to the *Federacja na Rzecz Kobiet i Planowania Rodziny* (Fereration for Women and Family Planning 2010, 2), for many adults, subjects connected to sexuality constitute a taboo. They are unable to talk about sexual issues openly and often prefer that the school relieved them from this responsibility. Therefore, it is often the case that parents wish to delegate the unpleasant responsibility to the school, while teachers feel unprepared, untrained and simply lacking time to fulfil

this expectation. It is also interesting that it is mothers, rather than other family members who were named as responsible by my participants for informing their children about sex. This echoes the findings of numerous UK studies that suggest that mothers are the main providers of sex education in the home (Allen 1987; Holland, Mauthner and Sharpe 1996). Women are still regarded as the major caregivers and therefore the main health educators in the home (Walker 2001). In my study specifically, the gender of the participants might also account for that expectation, as mothers might be perceived as possessing more relevant, experiential sexual knowledge by their daughters.

As I will discuss further in Chapter Eight, on a few occasions, parents' sexual relationships were described by my participants as no longer sexually satisfactory, something that is also at odds with the expectation that the parents should be effective sexual educators. Looking at the recurrent underlying patterns across responses by different participants, parents were perceived from the perspective of a generational gap as at once more experienced and knowledgeable but also as not possessing the kind of interest, understanding and up to date knowledge that might be useful and of interest to younger people.

Teachers too, were constructed as unwilling to discuss sexual matters; however, unlike in the case of the parents, embarrassment was acknowledged as a reason for their reticence. Somewhat at odds with the lack of acknowledgement for parents' embarrassment, embarrassment due to familiarity was given as a reason by some respondents:

Extract 19

Maria: I don't know if there was anybody apart from the class teacher but as he wasn't somebody detached he was a little bit embarrassed to talk about it. (B)

Extract 20

Dorota: There was one [lesson] in the primary school but taught by some older class teacher and quite, how to say it, like she had difficulties with it and it was embarrassing for her, that's how I saw it. (A)

Extract 21

Krysia: She [the sex education teacher] was absolutely terrified by the fact that she had to speak about anything, you know, sexuality and stuff. (B)

Teachers' unwillingness to deliver sex education was not associated with the fact that sex education as a school subject, especially one that pertains to practical matters and issues of sexuality, does not possess the same established status as, for example, maths or history, which enjoy recognised teaching specialisms. These problems were, conversely, discussed within the "sex education is a travesty" repertoire. The embarrassment in the above responses was not accounted by the lack of appropriate training, vocabulary or context for delivering sex education but by personal qualities of the teachers, such as their age or their familiarity and involvement with the students in their roles of class teachers. Speaking from the "sex education is a travesty" repertoire, which called for more appropriate and tailored sex instruction, it could be argued that the teachers' familiarity with their students might constitute a favourable characteristic for the delivery of effective and attentive sex education.

Missed Opportunity

Within the interpretative repertoire of sex education as "missed opportunity" both parents and teachers were depicted as, "too late" to deliver sex education when there was the time for them to do it:

Extract 22

Magda: I did not wait for the parents to enlighten me 'cause if I waited for them then I would still believe in storks and the cabbage patch. (A)

Extract 23

Dagmara: You know what, my mother always was like, "so if you want to talk about something with me then you can" but I think that she missed the right moment 'cause she started to talk to me about it when I was already going on girl guide holidays by myself, so I was a teenager and I knew what I wanted to know already. (B)

The responses below suggest the existence of a specific point – in Extracts 24 and 25, the school age of lyceum – when sexual illiteracy was a thing of the past:

Extract 24

Basia: In lyceum it was non-compulsory, so very few persons took part [in sex education lessons] and it was about things already obvious. (A)

Extract 25

Kinga: Say there was an opportunity to ask questions but . . . in the last year of lyceum, who really still has any questions? ((Laughter)) (A)

Extract 26

Alicja: It was called "Preparation for family life" then and really that was all too late, one knew everything already from various sources and it was definitely misconceived. (A)

The utterances, "things already obvious", "one knew everything already" and "I knew what I wanted to know already" suggest that these participants had no problems in educating themselves about sex. The fact that they "knew everything already" also explains why they did not take the existing sex education lessons seriously, as it was spoken from the "sex education is a travesty" repertoire. While failures of sex education were acknowledged in relation to the "shocking" cases presented by the media, participants did not position themselves as affected by this problem. In the context of their own sex education my informants constructed themselves as being able to acquire sexual knowledge one way or another.

Predominantly, participants identified peers and older family members as the main source of knowledge about sex, a finding supported by the research conducted by the Public Opinion Research Centre in Poland on the behalf of *Kampania na Rzecz Świadomego Rodzicielstwa* (Campaign for Conscious Parenthood 2008), which revealed that for fifty-five per cent of young Polish people, peers constitute the main source of information about sex. Teenage magazines were named as another source of useful information about sex. (My participants' involvement with newly emergent teenage

magazines will be discussed in detail in the next chapter devoted to the discourses of the sexualisation of culture in Poland.)

So far, I have discussed the interpretative repertoires around sex education in Poland and their features that constructed sex education in terms of a lack and inadequacy because it was not taken seriously, it was a wrong kind, delivered too late and the individual entrusted with its delivery were reticent and incompetent. In the following sections I explore in more depth the rhetorical aspects of these repertoires. Specifically, I examine how sex education was constructed within the interpretative repertoires of sex education and how, in turn, these constructions impacted on the ways that critiques of sex education were done discursively. I also inquire how participants orientated themselves towards the wider discourses of acquisition of sexual knowledge and how they constructed their identities within the repertoires of sex education in Poland.

Of Birds and Bees: Capturing Knowledge about Sex

As I discussed earlier, within the repertoires of sex education inadequacy, both teachers and parents were viewed as unprepared and unwilling to talk about sex. A further look into my conversations with the participants reveals the belief that it is not just any teacher that should be delivering the school's sex instruction but this responsibility should be given to specially trained teachers or psychologists:

Extract 27

Krysia: We did not have any special teacher who was assigned to this subject who was educated in this field so [lessons with biology teacher were] rather a way to try to cover the necessity by the school. (B)

Extract 28

Kasia: Well, I have a recollection that I had one and only one lesson in the year four of the primary school, really only one, about some, I don't know, anatomy, I don't know exactly, I don't remember. Nothing at all beside this, no conversations at all, no psychologists, so really that's tragic. (A)

Extract 29

Marzena: In our school it was a meeting with a teacher- Only she was not a trained psychologist but only it was some additional training course she had completed 'cause she was the PE teacher and we were somewhat appalled by this a bit. (A)

Both Krysia and Kasia emphasise the kind of knowledge that they were interested in that pertained to emotional aspects of sexuality, or involved – as Kasia stresses – conversations about the topic and juxtapose their expectations against the only lessons they received, that is, in biology and anatomy. The scope for these kinds of conversations is constructed within these accounts as belonging to the sphere of psychology, as suggested in Extracts 28 and 29. Notably, Kasia's utterance, " . . . so really that's tragic" speaks to the "sex education is a travesty" repertoire by invoking the typical notion of an extreme case of failure.

This understanding might be explained not only by the status of psychology as closely aligned to sexology but also by its spectrum of interests that, unlike biology, pertains to human relationships and emotions. Therefore, psychology constitutes the most appropriate backdrop for teaching about sexuality as an aspect of human relationships rather than an aspect of physiology. Psychologists, therefore, by the virtue

of their professional category and function are defined as the most suitable to teach effective sex education.

Looking at the wider discursive context of these narratives, the notion of leaving the complexities of sex instruction to specially trained professionals speaks to the ideals of scientific advancement, modernity and progress through education that were promoted during the socialist era and continue to dominate the discourse of post-transformation in Poland. Within this notion, science, rationale of the mind and professional knowledge possess the solutions to the problems of sex education, especially the problem of religious bias. To reflect this, as I have discussed in Chapter Three, professional sex advice in Poland has a longstanding and established tradition with some sexologists, such as Michalina Wisłocka or Zbigniew Lew-Starowicz, enjoying a household name status. It is usually formally trained sexologists who provide advice, not only in sex manuals but also in magazines, on radio and television programmes, and on the pages of the internet. In other words, instruction about sexual matters by appropriately trained professionals constitutes, in Poland, as in other locations, an established social practice. Also, as I noted in the methods chapter, my informants represented a homogeneous sample in terms of their educational background. All participants had or were aspiring to participate in higher education. The participants in Group A were students of law or medicine and their educational aspirations could be another explanation as to why these participants might have attached high value to scientifically informed sex education and therefore viewed psychologists as the most likely individuals capable of delivering sex education programmes.

Within the understanding that sex education should be delivered by professionals sexual knowledge is constructed as something tangible that can be conveyed and passed on another person over one or a series of occasions. This

construction also stipulates that sex education curricula could be designed in such a way that they could address the needs and beliefs of all young people. However, the participants in my study did not construct sexual knowledge in a unitary fashion. On the one hand, sex education was understood as an entity that could be organised in such a way that it could cover, "the elements that dealt with what interests people at this age" (Extract 2) and "concrete things" (Extract 6) as well as being, "down to the point" (Extract 3). On the other hand, there was an emphasis on the diversity of expectations and experiences within sexual encounters, which stressed that no single way of approaching sexuality should be considered as the right one. For example, I was given the following answers when I asked what kind of feelings, emotions or events should denote the readiness to have sex:

Extract 30

Tamara: There are as many approaches to sex as there are people and there are no one established and only right approach. . . . What is it normal? There is no norm here. Sexologists might call this pathological cases or something but we are aware of our own needs and what we expect from our partners, from our bodies, what we like, don't like and whether we don't like it at all, yes? 'Cause nowhere it says that everybody should have sex. (B)

Tamara emphatically denounces the standard-setting, normalising knowledge produced by sexology, which is somewhat at odds with the earlier notion proposed by other participants, that psychologists are the best qualified for the job of sex instructors. Perhaps psychology was earlier understood as a "softer" and less normalising science than clinical sexology; however, the notion of psychologists delivering sex education is still premised on the understanding that sexual knowledge can be captured within the

conventions of formal instruction. This understanding contradicts the construction of sexual knowledge voiced by many respondents, such as Kinga below, who pointed to the experiential rather than the formally acquired nature of sexual knowledge. Indeed, many participants talked about how sexuality is founded upon experiences within both long-term and casual relationships:

Extract 31

Kinga: Besides, really one can sometimes meet somebody who- with whom one can develop sexually during one night ((laughter)) And discover something that one hasn't- ((laughs)) that one hasn't discovered earlier. (A)

Similarly, the response by Renata below suggests that sexual knowledge and self-awareness is something elusive and fleeting that is acquired in the course of life, perhaps as a result of trial and error, rather than something that can be "picked up" in the course of one or many meetings or conversations:

Extract 32

Renata: To me as long as all sides are consenting- although in practice this always turns out completely the wrong way. 'Cause some friends of mine for example had sex in threesomes 'cause they were always curious about it but afterwards despite the fact that they really wanted to check it out and so on, they felt bad about it. But it was unavoidable 'cause they did not totally- I don't know if they didn't think this through, although it appeared that they did. So next time surely they think twice or talk to someone about it or something but often only after the fact it turns out that we did something that we did not really

want to do. They did not die from it though but simply discovered that it wasn't for them. (B)

The sexual self-awareness described above is derived from experiential rather than *a priori* knowledge acquired in the context of school. Renata initially constructs threesome sex as a risky activity and the kind of activity that her friends, were they more sexually knowledgeable and self-aware, would not have consented to. However, at the end of her response there is a shift in her argument and she concludes that it was not a risky or harmful activity after all. On the contrary, the people involved learned a valuable lesson about themselves. Although Renata proposes that the negative experience could have been avoided if her friends talked to other people, at the same time she emphasises her friends' curiosity and the inevitability of their actions. Her conclusion suggests that certain sexual behaviours, especially those perceived as transgressive and risky, cannot be truly evaluated without experiencing them or learning from one's mistakes.

The notion that sexual knowledge is gained through experience suggests also that knowledge about sex is not something that is *finite*, as suggested by the, "already knew everything" narratives in Extracts 23 and 25 as well as the response by Dagmara:

Extract 33

Anna: If you had questions about sex where would you search for answers?

Dagmara: Now or when I was younger?

Anna: When you were younger.

Dagmara: [Here Dagmara discusses the sources of sexual knowledge that she accessed when she was younger.]

Anna: And now?

Dagmara: Now I haven't got any questions. ((Laughs)) (B)

Only the understanding of sex knowledge as finite and learned by instruction can be effectively harnessed in critiques of sex education delivered by teachers and parents. It is less convincing to hold our parents and teachers responsible for our mistakes if we believe that sexual conduct and experience are subject to our own choice and diverse preference. Put in other words, the "ideological dilemma" (Wetherell 1996; Edley 2001) of holding adults accountable for our inevitable mistakes is resolved by constructing sexual experience in such a way that it could be passed from one person to another.

Sexual knowledge constitutes a broad entity with a wide-ranging spectrum of interests that could become topics covered by sex education, from practical information about how to use sanitary towels to more abstract matters, such as those described by Magdalena Środa (2009, 41) as, "knowledge about ourselves and others [that] is an important foundation of tolerance, deeper emotionality and a more authentic and responsible bond with others". Some of these topics may be easier to capture within sex education lessons than others. However, while a broad range of problems was emphasised within the interpretative repertoires of sex education in Poland, the complexity of some of these problems remained unacknowledged. The repertoires were characterised by an idealist tone of imperative and a demand for better sex education. This demand was placed in the context of the absence of consideration for the feasibility of delivering practical, interesting, inclusive and appropriate sex education to *all* students, as well as the appreciation of the complexity of many aspects that constitute sexual knowledge. In the following section, I will look at other rhetorical aspects of sex education repertoires and specifically explore the aspects of self-presentation and positionings of the participants within the repertoires I identified.

Implications of Bad Sex Education

As mentioned previously, the report by the feminist organisation *Ponton* (2009) is one of the most prominent recent publications about school sex education frequently cited by the media. The central feature of these media texts is the legitimisation of the authors' arguments by describing only negative and the most extreme cases of sex education malpractice and the lack of sexual knowledge amongst young people. For example, Magdalena Środa (2009, 42) quotes a case of a girl who induced an abortion by asking her male friend to kick her in the stomach. Notably, the lack of sexual knowledge amongst young people in Poland is universalised in the article. In other words, all young people in Poland are sexually naive and there are no positive instances that illustrate the contexts when sex education worked. Young people in Poland are "passivated" (Fairclough 2003, 145), represented impersonally and generically classified as "teenagers" rather than named, for example: "[Teenagers] do not know much about their own physiology. They are more than helpless in the sphere of sexuality, they are unassertive. . . . Schools keep young people in the state of ignorance convenient to politicians." (42–43) Furthermore, the curiosity of young people around issues of sex and relationships is constructed in the article in a one-dimensional fashion as a reason for concern and urgent intervention.

An extreme case from the report similar to the one quoted by Magdalena Środa was also recalled by one of my informants, Joanna:

Extract 34

Joanna: I read recently some articles, 'cause there was a great struggle for sexual education in schools and for example *Ponton* I know that they did some research on the topic. Really some statements by the kids were a great shock to

me what they were saying, rinse it with vinegar and then you won't get pregnant. Really it almost hurts when one reads things like these. And kids really believe in this. (B)

When using the repertoires of "sex education is a travesty" and "religious bias", the negative effects of inadequate sex education were predominantly – with the exception of Renata in Extract 18 and Joanna in Extract 35 below – described in relation to others rather than oneself. The young women out there constituted a stereotype against which the informants constructed their identity. They presented themselves as mature, articulate, knowledgeable and sophisticated social actors who managed to rise above the pitfalls of bad sex education. They possessed hindsight and their opinions were informed, which allowed them to avoid the kinds of mistakes highlighted by the media. Invoking the repertoire of "missed opportunity" that constructs knowledge about sex as finite, these participants in contradiction to the cases described by the media took the things in their own hands, educated themselves successfully about sex and "already knew everything". This testifies to the contradictory, situated and shifting nature of discursive narratives around sex education reforms in Poland, as well as the contentiousness around the understanding of what it is to "know about sex".

The responses of Renata in Extract 18 and Joanna represent an exception from the rule that positioned others but not oneself in the centre of sex education failures:

Extract 35

Joanna: If I had known some things earlier and knew about them solidly applied in practice and not only from what I read somewhere, I wouldn't have become a teenage mother for sure. If my parents, especially I feel really cross and angry with my mother, if she did right by me, sat with me, talked to me and

taken me to a doctor, that would have never happened but my mother is still very anti, even now she is still asking how I can be taking the pill. (B)

The above extracts suggest that Renata and Joanna hold their parents responsible for both very serious and less serious consequences of their lack of knowledge. They understand that communicating about sexual matters constitutes a duty of being a parent. However, as I have discussed earlier, sex talk often constitutes a problem for parents and they prefer that their children learned about embarrassing sexual matters elsewhere. The notion that young people must know about "these things" already from somewhere else, somewhat akin to the "missing opportunity" repertoire, is evident in Renata's mother's presumption that her daughter already knew how to use sanitary towels (Extract 18).

The responses by Renata and Joanna stand in striking contrast to the earlier account by Magda (quoted here again):

Extract 22

Magda: I did not wait for the parents to enlighten me 'cause if I waited for them then I would still believe in storks and the cabbage patch. (A)

Unlike Magda, Renata and Joanna appear to be deeply upset about their parents' lack of involvement in their children's sexual education. Like many other participants, Joanna emphasises the practical aspects of knowledge about sex, which might be interpreted again as unappreciative of the taboo status or complexities of practical aspects of sex. However, a further look at the specific nature of Joanna's complaint suggests that she also speaks from the "religious bias" repertoire. Not being educated how to use contraceptives, specifically oral contraceptives, suggests that it was her mother's moral

stand rather than her embarrassment that was to blame. The scarce information Renata did receive from her mother was similarly prejudiced.

Within these polarised narratives of implications of bad sex education, unlike the majority of the participants, Renata and Joanna construct their own experiences as warning cases that might serve as lessons from which others could learn. In Extract 18, Renata continues her response by saying, "I wanted to know absolutely everything. Absolutely everything interested me but I did not get any information at all" positioning her response in a stark constant with the "knew already everything" accounts. Both Renata and Joanna indicate that their relationships with their mothers were strained, a factor that made conversations about sex even harder. However, it was not merely the mothers' inability or embarrassment that stopped them but their attitude towards certain kinds of knowledge.

More importantly, for Renata and Joanna specifically, the mothers' unwillingness to educate their daughters was embedded within the wider problematic and gendered social order of Poland. Their own personal stories were used amongst many other examples to illustrate the situation of women in Poland. These stories and the associated discontent were also harnessed by these participants to construct their identities as feminists. (I will discuss the construction of feminist identities in Poland in Chapter Nine.)

Conclusion

In this chapter I presented the interpretative repertoires that threaded through my participants' narratives around sex education in Poland. Sex education in Poland was perceived as in a dire need of intervention due to its bad state. Sex education was a travesty because it was trivialised by both schools and pupils. It was blighted by factually erroneous and religiously biased information; something that reflected the

attempts of the Church to colonise the sphere of school sex education. Teachers and parents were viewed as untrained and unwilling to provide sex education; although problematic dimensions of sex talk and the lack of practical or discursive framework that would support their attempts was only partially acknowledged and only in some interpretative contexts. The inability of some parents to communicate effectively about embarrassing matters suggested some wider relationships' cultural and gender inequality problems. Sex education in school and home was defined as a missed opportunity, whilst young people educated themselves talking to their peers and reading teenage magazines.

Sex education was a site of ideological struggle where the Church's agenda was opposed by individuals demanding more diversity oriented, student tailored and unbiased sex education. Constructing sexual knowledge as something that could be captured and delivered during school lessons was harnessed to support the critiques of the existing sex education instruction. These critiques were often characterised by a tone of idealism with the lack of discussion about the practical considerations of schools as a site for the delivery of sex education. Extreme and sensationalising cases of sex education fiascos were cited by media commentators to legitimise their calls for urgently needed reforms. The ineptitude of teachers and parents was to be alleviated by moving the responsibility onto appropriately trained professionals, such as psychologists. While some participants used their own experiences of sex education failures as an impetus to become feminists, conversely the majority of the participants I interviewed positioned themselves as sexually knowledgeable, experienced and unaffected by the pitfalls of bad sex education. The next chapter will examine the rise of sexualised culture, which constitutes a backdrop for sexual learning in Poland.

Chapter Seven

Sexualisation of Culture in Poland

Introduction

After the systemic change in the late eighties, when Poland gradually transformed into a capitalist market economy, there has been a considerable expansion of sexualised imagery within the popular culture of the country. For example, in socialist Poland, films routinely featured so-called naked scenes or more appropriately naked lady scenes. However, whereas the naked lady scenes were explicitly sexual – the women were naked because they were just about to have sex – the newer images might feature fully clothed persons but are imbued with sexual meanings and innuendoes. Often they also appear in contexts that this kind of aesthetics was not present in before. Another very visible manifestation of sexualised culture in Poland are the advertising billboards featuring outright objectifying images of women or television commercials eroticising certain products such as ice-cream or beer by presenting women eating or drinking them, "in the state of utmost excitement, as if they are very close to reaching an orgasm" (Olczyk and Twardowska 2000).

Following the systemic transformation, Poland has also acquired its own versions of music channels, such as MTV and VH1, dominated by hyper-sexualised video clips by pop stars from around the globe, such as Rihanna, Beyoncé and Lady Gaga as well as local artists such as "busty blond" Doda. One of the most striking illustrations of how increasingly sexualised imagery has become commonplace within the Polish media in general, and also specifically within the artistic form of Polish music videos, are the video clips by the artist, Agniszka Chylińska. Agnieszka was once a member of the Polish rock band O.N.A. (H.E.R.) and a video clip from 1996,

"Kiedy Powiem Sobie Dość" (When I Say to Myself "Enough") features her wearing a loose shirt and military boots. The emphasis is put on creative and aesthetic aspects, without any explicit or implicit references to sex; Agnieszka's hair and clothes change from vivid orange, to yellow and then to blue. "I'll leave quietly because this is what I want", she sings poetically. In 2009, in the video promoting her solo career, entitled "Nie Mogę Cię Zapomnieć" (I Cannot Forget You), the metamorphosis is dramatic. Agnieszka is wearing a cleavage and hip revealing, high-cut, black bodysuit and sheer black tights. She is dancing using suggestive poses reminiscent of pole dancing, as water is being poured down on her. The content of the song is also drastically different, as Agnieszka declares, "I want you to have me".

When in 2009 – perhaps for the first time – sexualisation as a phenomenon and a topic of debate attracted considerable media coverage in Poland, the media attention did not concern video clips or advertising billboards but it focused on another matter altogether. The sudden eruption of interest in the matter was manifest as a new controversy and moral panic around the alleged expansion of teenage prostitution. Following the release of the film *Galerianki* (Mall Girls 2009), which portrays three teenage girls soliciting sex with men in shopping arcades in exchange for gifts such as mobile phones, a series of articles appeared in the Polish press raising concerns around the growth of teenage prostitution and the general, "lowering of the standards of how girls behave today" (Szlendak 2010, 29). "Why did they go off their rails?" asks Professor Tomasz Szlendak in the headline.

The notable responses to the media concerns around the apparent demoralisation of girls included the press articles by Anna Wójtewicz, a researcher into issues of young women and embodiment in Poland, and a Polish sexologist, Professor Maria Beisert. According to Wójtewicz (2010, 35), the limitations of the Madonna-whore dichotomy or as she described it, "no middle option available between the ideal of a shrinking

violet or a whore" leaves many young women with a difficult choice, especially in a situation where the sexual scripts that oscillate around the latter end of this spectrum are popularly depicted as a sign of sexual agency and empowerment (Gill 2003, 2008). Professor Maria Beisert similarly argues that in Poland, sexualised styles adopted by young women might be deployed as a means of the repudiation of the local prevailing but uncomfortable ideal of Polish Mother:

> Unfortunately [sexualisation] exists also here and is becoming increasingly visible. Paradoxically, it is the effect of our negative attitude towards sex. The omnipresent Catholic religion decidedly devalues female eroticism and entrenches the stereotype of Polish Mother. Our traditional upbringing enforces the view that a woman gains her social position from her role as a mother rather than from being a sexual creature. This negative tradition is our curse and some believe that the only sensible counterbalance is the opposite, extreme model. (Pągowska 2010)

It comes as no surprise, therefore, that in my conversations with the participants, sexualisation in the context similar to that presented by the media became a recurrent topic and in this chapter I examine the participants' accounts around this theme in more depth. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the entire transcribed data set was coded and the codes were grouped into meta-themes. One of these themes was the sexualisation of culture in Poland. The data within this theme was then explored for interpretative repertoires that the participants deployed to talk about phenomena around sexualisation. I identified four interpretative repertoires, namely: "sex is everywhere", "sexualisation is un-Polish", "the McDonaldization of Poland" and "girls gone wild". As in the previous chapter, I start here with the examination of the general discursive terrain and I discuss each interpretative repertoire, illustrating it with examples. In the last section of the chapter I concentrate on the identity work performed by the participants within the interpretative repertoires that I identified.

Sex Is Everywhere

Most respondents in this study emphasised that recently, with the introduction of the market economy in Poland and as a result of globalisation (see Extract 42), the use of sexual images in everyday culture was ubiquitous and constituted one of the most common representational practices in advertising. Within the "sex is everywhere" repertoire, sexualised culture was viewed as operating both within newly emergent contexts that did not exist prior to the system change, such as advertising billboards or television commercials, and by appropriation of the traditional settings, such as women's magazines. Furthermore, according to the "sex is everywhere" repertoire, sexualised images are not only more prevalent, but also qualitatively different from sexual representations that were visible in Poland before and in the earlier stages of the systemic transformations. These images "are everywhere"; they are outrageous, inappropriate and out of place:

Picture 1: Advert for scrap metal

Extract 36

Renata: I mostly come across this type of messages on billboards where there are for example adverts for roofing materials or tin sheets and a woman who is wearing this type of attire and who is taking different poses as if she having sex with the roof and there is lots and lots of this. (B)

Extract 37

Dagmara: I think that this is more and more blurred because only some years ago for example any sort of allusions to oral sex were not possible in advertising and now they are absolutely an everyday occurrence and there are more and more things of this type. . . . I would prefer if on one billboard were a woman on another one were a man, yes? More in that direction, towards some balance. 'Cause I think that at this stage we cannot avoid nudity in advertising, it has simply gone too far, it is not possible to stop it and that's it. If we are even selling spices or socks through nudity then I'm sorry we cannot do anything about this, it will stay like this. (B)

Just as in the "sex education is a travesty" repertoire in the previous chapter where the truth status of the speakers' claims was enhanced by extreme examples of sex education malpractice, similarly here, the claims are made truer by the deployment of illustrative instances of yet another inappropriate context or way in which sex is being used to persuade or sell. Within this repertoire, sex and sex-imbued images were perceived as permeating, saturating and eroding the local culture. They were defined as bothersome because despite their outrageousness and inappropriateness, they were not viewed as such by the others:

Extract 38

Joanna: Advertisements are of course another huge problem and I already mentioned in an article I had written [for *Zadra* feminist magazine] that something absolutely very strange is taking place: not only do porn aesthetics permeate the mainstream and nobody sees any problem with this, just look at the billboards. And my favourite is when in a newsagent there are porn magazines next to colouring magazines for children, this is my favourite. (B)

Notably above, Joanna's response is spoken from the vantage point of her feminist stance (that I will discuss further in Chapter Nine). Joanna here is not only a feminist but also an active and published media commentator, who represents a different and critical kind of press, where sexualisation is not practised but discussed as a topic of critical and feminist inquiry. More importantly, for Joanna, it is not *just* that sex is everywhere. She uses irony ("this is my favourite") to express her outrage against the mainstreaming of pornographic image. The irony where a positive word is used to enhance a negative meaning was also used by other participants. For example, Monika, in an extract not quoted here, described women portrayed on the covers of *Cosmopolitan* as "these charming ladies" (also see the response by Beata in Extract 53). The expansion of sexually imbued culture was not only perceived as overbearing but also as foreign.

Sexualisation Is Un-Polish

Newly emergent representations of female sexuality visible in women's magazines, video clips and advertising were perceived as alien and difficult to translate into everyday Polish reality. While many examples discussed within the repertoires of sexualisation related to the media, the spilling of sexualised attitudes into the everyday

lives and behaviours of individuals was another way to understand sexualisation (see also the discussion of the "girls gone wild" repertoire). Milena and Magda discuss sexual realities of Polish women's lives and juxtapose Poland against two other countries in Western Europe. Poland here is seen as a location where the sexual relations are governed by different expectations and canons:

Extract 39

Milena: I think that here is still a bit different and I don't know if this is still to come from the West. There somewhat is more, Jesus how to say, an instrumental approach. There, very often when I went out- going out to a club in Spain, I felt that I was a piece of meat and that the guy would count that he would go out with me and that- that- This is not only when it comes to men. There, many girls behave that way whereas for me this is vulgar. I can dance and dance even provocatively but this is not that I go out on the prowl and sometimes I felt as if I was taking part in some kind of a hunting game.

Anna: Mmm-hmm

Magda: Oh yes. And there is normal that the first date often ends up in bed. I had a comparison because my sister is in Germany and she was greatly shocked when she got there and she goes out with somebody and the man is simply unhappy that, I don't know, that he did not score or something. (A)

Within the above narrative, the West is constructed as a site of alienation and commodified relationships. The western reality was often juxtaposed against the aspirations of the participants to form meaningful relationships based on spiritual connection and partnership. (I will discuss this topic further in the next chapter.) Notably also, the positive sense of uniqueness and Polishness was achieved within this

repertoire not by an explicit assertion about how "great" Poland is but by contrasts with other countries, values and practices.

The newly emergent ideals of femininity were also viewed in terms of detachment and inaccessibility and as something that is visible but too alien or simply too unacceptable for the majority of Polish women to put into practice. Alicja and Milena talked more specifically how the popular media discourses of women as skilled and knowing sexual entrepreneurs, who flaunt their sexualities and actively pursue sexual encounters, do not conform to the lives of young women in Poland. Here, there are the tensions between the apparently emancipated modes of sexual expression for women as visible in the media and the Polish traditional understanding of sex roles and the attitudes towards acceptable sexual behaviours:

Extract 40

Anna: And what is a normal girl?

Alicja: A normal girl? In Poland or in general?

Anna: In Poland

Alicja: Well, for example full of complexes, somewhat still unsure, tries to be liberated but is still not totally allowed, I don't know, maybe not so much by the parents but by the culture, quite controversial, after all. (A)

Extract 41

Milena: This kind of flaunting of your female sexuality I think, I don't know if only in Poland or in other countries in Europe as well but I believe that we women are probably more- I don't know, we are not prepared to flaunt our sexuality or our needs like this. (A)

The repertoire of "sexualisation is un-Polish" is founded upon an element of disassociation and contrasting. Sexualised culture is something that is experienced and observable out there rather than within the realm of personal experience where more sensible and locally appropriate modes of conduct are practised. The Catholic religion in Poland constitutes a source of an internal cultural force that constituted a barrier against foreign influences:

Extract 42

Iwona: I think this is more a result of some kind of globalisation or something, 'cause I think that these themes are more from the West, I don't know how to put it. I think that the mentality of Polish women does not fit somewhat these themes.

Anna: In what sense?

Iwona: I mean, I think that this sexual liberation that apparently is promoted in the West, in the western countries and the consciousness of Polish women somewhat does not function to the same degree. 'Cause I am from a small town and there for example the regard towards the Catholic religion, the values take hold and there is perhaps no such social backing for magazines like these and even if women, I don't know, would like or feel such a need then society kind of restricts it, yes. (A)

Extract 43

Zofia: In our country still Catholicism and religion have influences so generally there is no social approval as much as in the western countries for this kind of behaviour or clothes. (A)

According to this repertoire, Poland, as a location, possesses a unique identity where the values of tradition, history, religion, education, high culture and, most of all, family, are paramount. Within these values, the role of women is also inscribed. The standards associated with sexualisation, for example, by connoting promiscuity, are seen as incompatible, jarring or even offensive to these locally prevalent values. These values are dually understood: positively as emphasis on relationships built upon intellectual, communicative and emotional connections and more negatively, as Catholic religion. Notably, religion as standing in the way of the change was also an explanation utilised within the religious bias of sex education repertoire in the previous chapter. There, however, this influence was perceived as overtly negative, whereas here, it is constructed as something inevitable, deeply embedded into everyday reality and difficult to change.

The McDonaldization of Poland

The McDonaldization of society, as a concept, was defined by George Ritzer (1993, 13) and denotes the regulation of large social structures by the means of "efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control" in order to achieve the optimum growth of power, influence and profit. The effects of such a regulation include dehumanisation and homogenisation of the social structures involved. Within the repertoire of "the McDonaldization of Poland", the new modes of highly sexualised expression were perceived as alien and un-Polish, not only because of their clash with traditional ideals of femininity but specifically because of their low aesthetic value. Indeed, one of the participants, Marta, used the very term when she described newly-emerged women's magazines as a glossy and kitschy manifestation of "McDonaldization" of Poland. McDonaldized, according to the above opinion, means offending the Polish sensibility more used to sophisticated content. For example,

Dorota disparages the aesthetics of video clips that revolve around bodily and sexual(ised) characteristics rather than around an intellectual message:

Extract 44

Dorota: I'd start maybe with video clips. This is really so, you know- the women are increasingly more undressed and so on. I think this really came from the western culture and I do not really like it. When it comes to video clips, the artistic aspects are pushed to the side and the most important are, I don't know, pretty girls with beautiful figures almost naked. (A)

The qualitative changes within video clips described in the introduction to this chapter were paralleled by the transformations within women's magazines that took place gradually, with the most visible change at the turn of the century marked by the introduction of Polish editions of foreign titles, such as *Cosmopolitan*. The dissolution of the state publishing body that governed print media during the socialist period and the necessity to compete in the new commercial market, where revenues were secured by advertising, brought about a drastic shift in the content and aesthetics of a majority of titles. I illustrated this in Chapter Three by describing the fate of the long-standing Polish magazine for young women entitled *Filipinka*. As one study showed, in the seventies and eighties, the magazine was dominated by the coverage of social, cultural and political issues, as well as reviews of literature, film, theatre and art (Piwowarska 2003). In contrast, its late 2004 and 2005 editions were almost entirely devoted to topics such as fashion, cosmetics, flirting and horoscopes.

Bravo magazines, that were a focus of analysis in Chapter Five, were recognised as one of the offenders within the "McDonaldization" repertoire. Indeed, "absurd", "crude", "nonsense", "senseless", "sensational", "bad", "shabby", "tacky", "unhealthy"

and "mendacious" were the adjectives used by the participants to describe the contents of the *Bravo* and *Bravo Girl!* magazines that constituted the newly emerged teenage magazines when they were teenagers. One participant illustrated her opinion of the *Bravo* magazines:

Extract 48

Agnieszka: They are bad in the sense of being shoddy. They appear to touch upon topics but in a very trashy way and simultaneously, yes, they're like a typical McDonalds. (B)

Cosmopolitan too, was dismissed. The respondents commented how the quality of information about sex and relationships in the magazine *Cosmopolitan* might not appeal to many women in Poland, who appreciate and expect less "pictorial" and more intellectual content:

Extract 45

Nina: It is there to make you smile but not a source of some knowledge or something that we treat seriously in order to find things out.

Paulina: To read something on the train it is better to buy *Newsweek*.

Ela: I have never bought *Cosmopolitan* to read on the train. (A)

Extract 46

Kasia: I think that this is a case of preying on a woman's vanity and paying attention to her appearance, the externals and really- I don't read this, surely not regularly. Perhaps browse through it sometimes at the dentist or hairdressers and I totally did not find anything there of any interest to myself. Maybe some

> interview with somebody famous, perhaps I read that but there was nothing there beside this that really interested me. These are simply empty magazines. One can look at the pictures maybe. (A)

One of the typical features of this repertoire, specifically in the context of the talk about magazines, was a recurrent confessional narrative of coming across these magazines by chance rather than buying them. Reading of these magazines in these circumstances involved, "having a lot of laugh" as a result, or at least required looking at their contents, "with a large dose of humour". Another way of engaging with the magazines, speaking from this repertoire, was to repudiate them as low-end media that "repulse" educated and discerning audience:

> **Extract 47**
>
> **Tamara:** These magazines are really low level . . . This is surely an ideal promoted by the media or rather the low-end media really. I don't know if women want to look like this. Surely women who are sexually self-aware do not like to look like that. At least I do not want to look like that. (B)

Within this repertoire, the instrumental treatment of relationships within women's magazines where "tricks and techniques" matter the most and emotional and communicative aspects are sidelined, were uniformly denounced. Therefore, for example, one of the *Cosmopolitan*'s defining features is the plethora of seemingly inexhaustible in their variety, brave, daring and unusual sexual techniques, positions and games, was perceived as a negative and narrowing trend, rather than a sign of diversity and progress. Many respondents also pointed to the imperative tone of "must do" as a defining and disturbing feature of these magazines. Some of them stated, and

this was not dependent on their explicit feminist allegiance, that the magazines "pressurised" women rather than men to do "ridiculous" things. One speaker, Nina (Group A) pointed out that, "There are no such magazines for men that they are told what a woman should do. Men just talk to one another", while another participant, Paulina (from the same group) remarked, "Reading *Cosmopolitan* I've got an impression that they command me to be a man's slave". Within this narrative, the magazines' imperative and gendered tone was perceived as offending women's individuality, independence and autonomy and therefore, despite the image of a liberated female that they are trying to convey, they are antithesis to the emancipation of women.

Girls Gone Wild

The participants in my study talked about how teenage girls learned about sex and sexuality, not only, as previously discussed, in the context of the shortcomings of formal education but also within the overwhelming influence of the transforming and corrupting popular media. Often, this early stage of the person's development was characterised by an undiscerning enthusiasm for the media, such as women's magazines. I will use the concept of "interpellation" defined by Althusser (1971, 174), which posits that individuals are "hailed" or called by ideologies to assume certain subject positions. As David Gauntlett puts it in simpler terms, "interpellation occurs when a person connects with a media text: when we enjoy a magazine or TV show, for example, this uncritical consumption means that the text has interpellated us into a certain set of assumptions, and caused us to tacitly accept a particular approach to the world" (2002, 27). According to the "girls gone wild" repertoire, girls are seen as the most susceptible subjects of culturally dominant and highly visible modes of sexual expression, who perhaps do not possess the understanding or access to alternative

formulations of sexuality. It is interesting that it is girls, rather than boys, who are identified as the subjects of this interpellation. This suggests that this repertoire is embedded within the much older discourse of sexual respectability and risk inherent to the sexual activity of women.

The promotion of raunchy, hyper-sexualised femininity was associated on many occasions with the Polish pop star Doda. Doda's sexualised style resembles the styles adopted by many other pop stars across the globe, in that she has long, platinum blond hair, surgically-enhanced breasts (she is often photographed wearing cleavage-exposing attires), suntanned complexion and a toned, slender figure. As Helen Pidd notes in *The Guardian*:

> Possibly the most famous woman in Poland today – after the ubiquitous Virgin Mary – is Doda, a pneumatic blond popstar who keeps Polish gossip columns in business. Chopin aside, Doda, 27, is one of the most successful Polish musical artists of all time. She is also one of its most controversial. (Pidd 2011, 26)

What is perhaps unique about discourses around Doda is the emphasis on her being a successful and confident businesswoman who, despite her overtly sexualised conduct, possesses high intelligence and is a member of Mensa International. Doda's image is, therefore, dichotomous. On one hand, she is perceived as an indicant woman – or a media "slut" (Jackson and Vares 2011) – and on the other hand she represents an ideal post-feminist role model; she is attractive and sexy but also resourceful, independent and intelligent.

The model of femininity promoted by Doda is perceived as having a specific impact on young women. Tomasz Szlendak, in the already mentioned article in the Polish magazine *Focus* (2010, 30) stated that the fans of Doda are ten years younger than her but imitate her provocative style uncritically. Similar opinion was also expressed by some respondents in my research:

Picture 2: Doda

Picture 3: Girls gone wild?

Extract 49

Anna: Okay. I would like to ask about the ideals of female sexuality, more in the sense of dress styles. I have a picture of Doda here and a picture from England as well. I would like to ask if this is also happening in Poland or is it different.

Aldona: As for now, today, yes it is. Especially, say, amongst girls in the gymnasium 'cause I think it is no longer the case amongst, I don't know, the people of my age or older than me as well, probably not to same extent. And now I have an impression that the younger the women the more they are affected by this kind of ideal. (B)

Extract 50

Dorota: I believe so but it brings more to mind teenagers. Teenagers and then I can see actually with my friends I really notice that they later somehow grow out

of it, yes, and rather, I don't know, sixteen- or seventeen-year-olds behave like this, dress like this and then they develop a rather more serious outlook. (A)

Extract 51

Kinga: There are such [nightclubs, discos] where say, I don't know, girls from gymnasiums or lyceums go dressed like this. And there are some others, where university students go who not necessarily all wear miniskirts. Well, the priorities change a little bit ((laughs)) and one doesn't care that much about attracting attention. (A)

In my interviews, the overtly sexualised attire was often associated not only with young age but also with a lack of knowledge about the world or perhaps more specifically, a lack of knowledge about sexual matters. Many participants believed that lack of sexual knowledge on behalf of young women meant that they "didn't know any better" or in other words, did not realise that their sartorial choices might have some negative or even dangerous long-term implications. Therefore, conversely, having a hyper-sexualised image was seen on one the one hand as a "phase" of adolescence that was deemed as not having a lasting detrimental impact and on the other hand it was viewed as a source of risk with long-term consequences. The management of identity in the context of discourses about sexual risk and respectability are a topic of the next chapter. The focus of the following section of this chapter is the participants' positionings and self-presentation within the interpretative repertoires that I identified above.

"Huge Mass Who Buys These": Identity and the Media in Poland

The talk about the sexualisation of Poland was suffused with identity work, which was accomplished by dissociation and different contrasts. This included the contrast with adolescent girls, the "victims" of sexualisation who dressed too sexily; the contrast with the West that was seen as a site of commodified attitudes towards relationships and love; and the contrast with uneducated audience of low-end magazines. The negative effects of sexualisation were predominantly described in relation to others rather than oneself. As in the case of failed sex education in the previous chapter, the young "victims" of sexualisation were uninformed, manipulated, naive and invariably, "the other":

Extract 52

Aldona: I saw once a TV programme here, I don't know, say, it is a sort of Polish *Oprah Winfrey*, something like that. And there, this one was with many very unusually dressed teenagers. There was a girl there, sixteen years old, really short skirt, I didn't know where her top ended and the skirt started and so on, very so to say provocatively dressed and made up. And at some point the presenter said something to her that she sexually provokes men and she couldn't get what the presenter was on about at all. When it came to the issues regarding sex, despite her dress style and behaviour, she was at the level below the age of twelve when it came to awareness in general. (B)

Extract 53

Beata: Recently there was a programme about the sexuality of young women and how they prepare for the first time and these young ladies [irony] were

> buying hand towels, tablecloths, and incense sticks. And there were something like five girls who were asked, one thought about protection, but when the psychologist asked where did she read about the tablecloths and incense sticks, they were guided by, in the *Cosmopolitan* it was written that it is nice when it smells good in the room and the hand towel she was going to keep as a memento. (A)

Within this repertoire, the girls described have failed because they were swayed by the corrupting media and pursued naive, irresponsible and risky sexual behaviours. Unlike the participants themselves, who understood what factors are important for the formation of satisfying and lasting relationships, they fell for the superficial media "tricks". I will interrogate how the participants' constructed satisfying relationships in the next chapter.

As noted, the respondents talked about never buying *Cosmopolitan* magazine themselves but rather coming across some copies in a dentist surgery or being given some by a neighbour. In few cases the denouncement of the magazines like *Cosmopolitan* and *Bravo* was less subtly expressed:

> **Extract 54**
>
> **Renata:** My god, really I don't read these papers. . . . I mean, I live in this country but I don't get it at all, so- I don't get at all this content and these magazines. And I understand that there is a group of women and citizens in general in this country to whom, yes, this stuff does not appeal. And hence I don't know what this is all about, what they are trying to convey here. But I also understand that there is a huge mass who buys these here. (B)

While Renata acknowledges both the high visibility of sexualised materials as well as their appeal to some members of the Polish society, she positions herself decidedly as different from the "other" individuals and immune to the pitfalls of sexualisation. Similarly, other participants talked about how teenage magazines such as *Bravo* or *Bravo Girl!*, when they first emerged in Poland, constituted a sensation as well as highly circulated and borrowed material about sex (irrespective of the social status of the readers as indicated in Extract 55), to then dismiss them as low quality nonsense:

Extract 55

Nina: It was not even a question of the social status, everybody- this was a real source then. I don't know about today, likely there are many more magazines like that. (A)

Extract 56

Anita: Well, I used to read such magazines but as we just said here, I didn't treat them as a source of knowledge but rather we laughed with friends. And there was "My First Time" section and we read it blushing but surely I didn't treat it as a real source of knowledge. (A)

Extract 57

Alicja: With hindsight, then I thought that these were the very first steps, that I was very young, I don't know, I was eight or nine, the first magazines and then I was reading those soppy letters from fifteen-year-olds. These were, you know, very early stages and now surely when I am more aware how the media really operate I think these letters were not really authentic but were the editors' creations. (A)

Extract 58

Justyna: At the time when I was a young girl I read the magazines of the *Bravo, Popcorn* type and there, there were always some "My First Time" sections and of course I was into them, I was under the illusion it was for real and it happens like this for real. With time when I grew up I decided that this was nonsense and surely it is not like that ((laughs)). (B)

The above "confessional" tales of former naivety serve as a prime (ethno)method for building one's current identity as sophisticated and mature. These distinctive tropes echo something that Margaret Wetherell (1996, 38) identified as, "it's just the media" interpretative repertoire, "which sets up contained subjects positions or voices sometimes in opposition to each other". Within Renata's response in Extract 54, the identity of a strong, free-thinking individual who is not swayed by the media is juxtaposed against those of the "huge crowd" to whom these magazines appeal. The participants constructed their identities as the members of an intellectual, enlightened and educated stratum of the Polish society. They believed their opinions to be informed and considered, unlike other readers who were duped by the values promoted by dummified and trashy lower-end media. Similarly, in the previous chapter, the identity of a mature, articulate and sexually informed individual who did not fall pray of bad sex education was juxtaposed against media exposed sex education "victims".

However, considering the responses below, it is a specific "quibble" that the informants have to justify their disassociation from the magazines, namely, that the magazines do not reflect the complexities of genuine relationships. And as Marzena in Extract 60 below points out, despite the apparent sophistication and diversity of sexual aspects, the portrayals in the magazines are stereotypical:

Extract 59

Dorota: This *Cosmopolitan* and such, I don't know, "nine tricks that will make men like you even more" ((laughs)) are however- Somewhat better educated people can find their own way in heterosexual relations and they know that they are deeper than these tricks and the advice from the magazines, don't they? (A)

Extract 60

Marzena: I like to skim through this magazine and really like my colleagues have just said, certainly everything in here is organised around the same schema, everything. . . . But I don't know how many women really apply this to their everyday lives with their partners. And- and I don't know, I for example do not identify myself at all with the women in there and despite that I know what kind of techniques are there, I somehow never applied this to my own sex life. And I take it as yes, you can do it like this and there are many things you can do, they repeat themselves with those various tricks any this is stereotypical. And it does not appeal to us. I just like to browse through it. (A)

Extract 61

Joanna: I generally do not much like the attitude promoted today by glossy magazines, 'cause I have an impression that this is an attitude on the par with *Sex and the City* and the third wave, in other words kind of glorifying sex as a pleasure and pleasure is the number one and nothing else matters. This is a little bit, I think, turning sex into sport and the attitude that this is some kind of competition and the skills in bed rather than that there is after all a little bit more

> that happens during sex and it's not merely important to us how much and how good. (B)

Both Marzena and Joanna in Extracts 60 and 61 use the pronoun "us", which suggests that they do not construct their identities as individuals but as members of a group. This collective identity might be understood as "real" women in Poland, rather than women portrayed in the magazines, as in Extract 60, or the television programmes representative of the third-wave feminism, as in Extract 61. This understanding would indicate that the artificial portrayals fall short of reality because they are foreign, restrictive and simplistic, as well pertaining to the instrumental understanding of relationships. However, in Extract 59 the disassociation is done not specifically because the portrayals are unreal or un-Polish. Dorota constructs the collective identity on a different polarised scale as "educated people", something that was also implied by Renata in Extract 54, whose tone of dismay and surprise that the magazines appeal to a "huge mass" suggests a similar reading. The collective identity of sophisticated and savvy individuals capable of seeing through the manipulations of the media was further utilised within the narratives of successful and satisfying relationships. It was also deployed in the accomplishment of another identity: the identity of a feminist. These topics will be further explored in Chapter Nine.

Just as sex education in the previous chapter, the sexualisation of culture in Poland was not constructed in unitary terms. It is important to stress that women's magazines or magazines that women in Poland read were not understood to be restricted to the lifestyle genre and this is evident in Extract 45, where Paulina said that she preferred *Newsweek*. Within this context, it was only certain magazines that were implicated in the McDonaldization of Poland. Furthermore, media content that was

associated with sexualisation was not always perceived in negative terms, as in these extracts:

Extract 62

Dagmara: If we look at Doda then okay we can disagree with her but at least she is a strong woman, at least a woman who is doing stuff herself, is not afraid to make decisions, looks after herself, is able to take care of herself in the financial sense, make a career and so on. . . . I think it is good that at least they emphasise that- it is not certain if these IQ tests are a little bit distorted but at least they say that she has a very high IQ. Then darn it, it is better that they are saying this than that she has great tits. This is to me already a positive thing. (B)

One of my interviewees, who initially expressed the criticism regarding music video clips, contrasted later bad quality video clips with the ones featuring Lady Gaga:

Extract 63

Dorota: On the other hand for example, with the recently famous Lady Gaga, this is not so offending.

Anna: Can you tell me why?

Dorota: I was thinking about it just recently and decided that it does not offend so much, perhaps because it is not just bikini and that's it ((chuckles)), 'cause this is so shallow, there are almost no bikinis and she is- I appreciate the theatrical aspects here and despite the fact that she is undressed, there is however, one can see, some artistic premeditation, some creativity and not only wriggling girls and that's it ((chuckles)). (B)

Other counter opinions about the changes related to sexualisation pointed to the positive aspects of the contemporary liberalisation of sexual relations in Poland. These transformations were responsible for giving women not only greater access to information about sexual issues but also allowing them to express their sexualities in less restricted or traditional ways:

Extract 64

Monika: I think that in the old days only female sexuality was suppressed, was reduced to its practical value, family, children and now – and this is undoubtedly thanks to *Cosmopolitan* and even these say *Bravo* and *Dziewczyna* [Girl] magazines – that we have more awareness that a woman also can source pleasure out of it, she does not have to be a child-making machine and have sex without the necessity of having children 'cause we have contraception. (A)

What is notable about these positive instances given by the informants, is that the appraisal of the sexualised culture is done alongside the same dimensions as the criticism, namely: intelligence, aesthetics and the appreciation of the complexity of outcomes and preferences within relationships. The above contradictory readings do not disrupt the identity of the participants as savvy media consumers. The participants simply present a reasoned and informed approach and recognise more positive aspects of the media when they occur. They also understand that sometimes the exceptions are there to prove the rule.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the new research area of sexualisation of culture in Poland. Opinions of young Polish women, some of whom were self-declared feminists,

were used to map the discussion of this complex and controversial phenomenon. Infrequently referred to by its name, sexualisation denotes many different things. In Poland, the expansion of teenage prostitution, as well as apparent lowering of standards of sexual conduct amongst young women, was something that brought the debates around sexualisation to the public arena.

My research project that concentrated on the media themselves, and specifically the representations of female sexuality, showed that sexualised modes of expression were seen by young, educated Polish women as an alien and imported phenomenon associated with the globalisation of Poland. Sexually focused styles of dress and behaviour visible in the media, especially in women's magazines or music videos, were perceived as at odds with traditional Polish values. Not only were they jarring with local tradition but they were a sign of deterioration of culture that once focused on educational and subversive qualities of artistic expression. Rather than a sign of sexual liberation, sexualised model was seen by a majority of participants as a sign of something termed as the McDonaldization of Poland.

The participants constructed their identities as sophisticated media consumers who were not swayed or convinced by the low value ideals promoted by the media. The respondents considered themselves as belonging to educated audience who appreciates more complex understanding of issues than that presented by the newly emergent sexualised media. Role models such as the hyper-sexualised pop star, Doda, were considered as having specific appeal to very young women, who were considered undiscerning because of their lack of sexual education and maturity. In the following chapter I will further explore the narratives of developing sexuality, this time specifically in the context of the conversations about the factors that contribute to the creation of successful and satisfying relationships.

Chapter Eight

Satisfaction in Relationships

Introduction

This chapter is concerned with the participants' narratives about forming and sustaining happy relationships. During my interviews I used examples of self-help materials to stimulate conversations but these texts did not become the major focus of the interviews because the participants were always ready to provide their own interpretations of the issues at hand. I identified three different interpretative repertoires around satisfaction in relationships and the first section of this chapter focuses on the discussion of these repertoires. The next section examines these repertoires in relation to the participants' self-positionings, intersubjectivity and identity work. This is followed by the interrogation of the discourses within which these repertoires might be located, as well as the exploration of how these discourses possess the capacity to legitimise and restrict everyday actions.

It is important to stress that many narratives discussed here do not directly focus on the issue of relationship satisfaction but are nevertheless included in the analysis because they have an indirect but significant bearing on the issue of relationship satisfaction. The three interpretative repertoires about relationship satisfaction that I identified are, "exclusive mutuality", "yin and yang" and "the spark to be kindled". While the "exclusive mutuality" repertoire represented a key, global repertoire denoted by a recurring argumentative content that threaded through the conversations about different topics, such as sex education and sexualisation, the other two repertoires were more local and constituted a feature of talk that pertained to relationship satisfaction.

Exclusive Mutuality

Within the interpretative repertoire of "exclusive mutuality", romantic love, affection and emotional connection constitute a foundation of a truly satisfying relationship. Here, there is an ambiguity with translation and conveying of the meaning from language to language that requires some explanation. The participants were often referring to it not as "love" but as *uczucie*, the Polish word that could be equally translated as "affection", "attachment" or "the special feeling". This special feeling is based on an emotional bond and understanding that could only be built within the context of a long-term relationship or the "proper" or "complete" relationship. Defining this bond as "affection" is a linguistically common form deployed to legitimise something that is a real and lived phenomenon, as opposed to "love" which is a somewhat prosaic term associated with the discourse of romantic love in the popular media, especially Hollywood films or romance novels. In Polish, the term *uczucie* possesses the kind of discursive sophistication that *miłość* (love) does not:

> **Extract 65**
>
> **Alicja:** When you really feel this true and genuine *uczucie* for the other person then this is the right time and it is not a question of age or, I don't know, that you've been with each other a long time. (A)

The staple feature of this repertoire echoing the narratives of texts analysed in Chapter Five, here, is pondering the notion of readiness versus unreadiness for love and sex. Being ready within this narrative is signalled by having an instinctive feeling that this is the "right person". This readiness cannot be easily pinpointed and otherwise determined by factors such as age. The "true and genuine *uczucie*" developed in this

kind of relationship is understood as being one of the “higher” or “deeper feelings” and juxtaposed against other less significant feelings that a person might have within relationships that are less permanent or are still developing. Within this context, there is desire not only to take but also to give:

Extract 66

Paulina: Whereas in a long-term relationship, this is based on um higher feelings, there is *uczucie*, there is the bond with the partner. You want to give that pleasure and not only receive it and you also want to give pleasure to the partner and also to yourself by doing this. These are completely different relations. (A)

Within the repertoire of “exclusive mutuality”, the special bond between partners is sustained through understanding achieved through communication. This is an intellectual partnership based on mutual respect and closeness, and the participants firmly juxtaposed this type of partnership against the model promoted by magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* with its predictable platter of *Cosmo*-esque sex tips where relationships are treated instrumentally and in a task-based manner. Communication is a grounding principle because when it is in place there is no problem that couldn’t be worked out. It is founded upon mutual trust and the “prior establishing of mutual relations”. It serves not only as a means of exchanging information but it also involves the discussion of difficult or contentious issues without causing offence:

Extract 67

Kinga: This is the kind of understanding between two people enabling sharing of information without, I don’t know, causing offence or being offended. Being

able to talk in a relax manner to the other person about sex and then- then everything- everything should really work out ((laughs)). (A)

The special relationship is also based on self and mutual affirmation and acceptance. This is the acceptance of the whole person, both their personality and appearance, and both their positive features and their weaknesses. Self-acceptance supported by the mutual acceptance creates the conditions where partners share intimacy and can feel relaxed in each other's company.

Another key component of satisfaction within relationships in this repertoire is egalitarianism. Egalitarianism within sexual relations involves equal rights to sexual pleasure, the right to choose when to participate in sex and the free choice of preferred sexual activities:

Extract 68

Anna: What does a woman need for self-realisation in the sexual sphere?

Monika: Certainly an understanding partner, 'cause if the partner concentrates only on himself then- then this makes no sense, both in terms of the relationship and the sex itself. 'Cause sex has to be joy in itself and the source of advantage to both parties. (A)

Extract 69

Gosia: For sex to work, both parties should make an effort one party and the other one as well so the burden and the duty should not be- should not rest on the woman's shoulders. Or that she should have sex only to satisfy the man when she doesn't want it 'cause she doesn't simply feel like it. (A)

Egalitarianism within sexual relations should go hand in hand with the egalitarianism within other spheres of life, such as the male partner's involvement in domestic duties and especially his participation in child rearing. Many interviewees believed that ideally, child-raising responsibilities should be shared. However, this might not always be possible in practice because the partners might be too busy in today's fast-paced reality to organise such sharing of responsibilities and inevitably this task usually falls on the shoulders of the one who is perceived as a natural carer, that is, the mother. There was, however, a consensus amongst the participants that the times are changing and sharing of the child-rearing responsibilities is increasingly expected but this is still an aspiration rather than a fact.

Within the repertoire of "exclusive mutuality", sophisticated emotional connection between partners is the overriding foundation of sexual interactions. The satisfaction of emotional need resides above the satisfaction of physical need. At the same time, regular sexual activity is necessary to sustain the emotional relationship satisfaction. A true relationship should provide enough pleasure and be the sole source of sexual satisfaction:

Extract 70

Ela: When one is in a relationship, one sources the physical, sexual pleasure from that relationship and not from self-pleasing. (A)

Physical closeness is said to foster emotional closeness and experiencing physical pleasure in the context of emotional connection makes it a special, heightened kind of pleasure:

Extract 71

Beata: [Penetration] is only physical pleasure but when it comes to the emotional experiences they are probably much more important, especially when these two go hand in hand then there should be real pleasure and a real reason to do it. (A)

Extract 72

Zuza: And also there really isn't- at least in my opinion, there is no better thing than um learning each other's bodies . . . and attaining that perfection, so to say. (A)

Within this repertoire, individuality and individual preference for the most pleasurable sexual activities is emphasised. Foreplay is often more pleasurable for a woman than vaginal intercourse. Other sexual practices (beside genital intercourse) are important and they serve to sexually awaken and stimulate women. They appeal to the more sensual nature of women. However, there is a "push" towards having a genital intercourse without which things don't seem to be right and sexual satisfaction complete. When genital intercourse takes place some important barrier is broken. Any physical contact between loving partners facilitates the spiritual bond but because vaginal intercourse constitutes the closest form of physical connection where two bodies become one, this sexual activity becomes the true consummation, resolution and culmination of the spiritual connection. Therefore, genital intercourse becomes the only true and full expression of emotional bond. Women, unlike men who orgasm automatically, learn gradually to experience pleasure during intercourse and together with their partners perfect their sexual technique over time and therefore cement this

special kind of sexual bond. Physical pleasures of genital intercourse aside, women appreciate the physical closeness that it facilitates:

Extract 73

Anna: For example, sex without intercourse, would this be a problem for any reason?

Monika: Certainly there is the lack of closeness 'cause it is good sometimes to have cuddle with somebody and after all having a cuddle with a vibrator, what kind of joy is that? It is neither warm nor soft! (A)

Notably in the above extract, partner sex is equated with genital intercourse and sex without genital intercourse becomes solo sex with a vibrator, which places this narrative firmly within the scripts of the coital imperative. Extreme example is also used by Monika to add value to her claim and make genital intercourse self-evidently "better".

Genital intercourse is not only the culmination of the sexual act and other preliminary activities but also the type of sex that couples progress gradually towards over time after the initial involvement in other, less "serious" sexual activities. During one group meeting, at the point of the debate whether sex is genital intercourse or other practices classify as sex as well, laughter and banter erupted around this "Clintonian question". Ultimately, however, the participants framed oral sex, or as they defined it, "manual-oral contacts", as a preliminary and passing activity that couples involve in initially before they progress to vaginal penetration. Typically, oral sex was discussed by student participants in relation or comparison to genital intercourse, rather than as a subject of an independent focus.

It is worth noting that masturbation was predominantly framed as a solitary practice and not something that can be practised in the company of another person.

Some voices contended that masturbation might foster selfishness and the development of wrong sexual habits and preferences:

Extract 74

Beata: When young girls . . . learn these habits then for them um the adaptation to playing together will be very difficult. 'Cause this- this [masturbation] teaches kind of selfishness, egocentricity a bit. Then in a relationship when one starts having sex then it is not about your sole pleasure but also that um that the whole makes sense. (A)

Beata's understanding of masturbation, although not expressed exclusively by her, stood in contrast with other narratives and masturbation in women was predominantly considered as a preparatory activity that should be encouraged because it might help women discover their bodies and learn sexual pleasure. However, these narratives were predominantly embedded within the coital imperative scripts of sexuality, constructing masturbation as an additional and supportive activity but never as an activity in its own right. Within these accounts, solo masturbation of a person who is in a relationship was a sign that this relationship is not fully sexually or otherwise satisfying. There was, however, a couple of counter accounts to this understanding of masturbation, one of them expressed by Kinga:

Extract 75

Kinga: I don't know, I do not think that this is something that suggests that one of you is unsatisfied. This is simply doing something for oneself really. (A)

Reflecting the shifting and unstable nature of truth-seeking narratives, the notion of

"doing something for oneself" transgresses the repertoire of "exclusive mutuality" and its feature of altruism because sexual activity and pleasure are no longer premised on the presence of another person.

Within the repertoire of "exclusive mutuality", long-term special relationships stand firmly juxtaposed against other types of sexual relations, which serve to satisfy purely physical impulses rather than facilitate true, complete and emotionally fulfilling sexual experiences. Sex practised for sex only or sex for pleasure only is inferior to sex practised out of true affection. In the former, one's body only and not one's soul is given away. However, more casual relationships also give the opportunity to have fun and get it "out of your system".

Extract 76

Anna: Some women would say, "I want sex with many partners 'cause I want to try different things".

Ela: Exactly. And now all seem to advance in this direction. This is connected to the fact that the age in which people enter relationships is moving forward**.** Women want, men too, try things out, to blow off some steam, so to say. And later I will find the right man with whom I will fall in love, love him the true love and with whom I will be able to stay. (A)

Casual relationships are permitted, even advisable but serve mostly as a type of self-exploration and the preparation for that special, proper relationship. Within more casual relationships, a woman explores her sexual preferences, learns by her mistakes and matures sexually in this process. Her earlier experiences enrich the long-term relationship. Knowing when to have sex without the security of a committed special relationship is, however, a tough nut to crack:

Extract 77

Monika: One shouldn't start too early 'cause later one might have a feeling of self-disgust 'cause he wanted it and I thought I wanted it but I only thought that and wasn't really sure. One shouldn't force it. (A)

The difficult to capture, elusive and intuitive notion of being ready is again "worked out" in the above response. Other responses that considered casual relationships against long-term relationships listed the following factors in favour of the later ones. Having too many casual relationships might affect the chance and quality of the proper relationship. Casual relationships embarked on too early when a woman is not fully mature or when sex is coerced might lead to problems in terms of proper emotional and sexual development. They might lead to self-abjection where a woman feels objectified and used. Promiscuous lifestyle might also affect the woman's reputation. These accounts, thus, privilege the exclusive mutuality scripts by emphasising the dangers of relationships that do not belong to the exclusive mutuality category.

Yin and Yang

Women's phobias that I like…
I think the one that I like the most is about appearance. I think that the woman who stops thinking about her appearance stops thinking about her man. Look after this phobia, gentlemen! Kindle and nurture it and the world will be more colourful.
(From the interview with a Polish actor, Artur Żmijewski, featured in *Twój Styl* magazine, Biały 2010)

Us girls we are so magical
Soft skin, red lips, so kissable
Hard to resist so touchable
Too good to deny it
("I kissed a girl" by Katy Perry)

Within the second repertoire, which I identified as “yin and yang”, the egalitarianism of a heterosexual relationship is not only based on sharing of rights and responsibilities but also on the utility of female and male complementary roles and characteristics. This is supported by binary, dichotomous and mutually complementing sets of biologically determined traits and the attraction of opposites. One opposite is attractive, emotional and less sexual, while the other is less attractive, physically and emotionally strong and stable but sexually driven. Here, women are the beautiful sex:

Extract 78

Gosia: However, it doesn’t surprise me that other girls do [find other girls attractive] ’cause a woman’s body is more attractive than a man’s body and it really can- can attract interest on behalf of persons of the same sex. (A)

Extract 79

Alicja: Right from the start I’m reading [in a magazine letters’ page] that she is walking on the street and stares, I don’t know, pays attention to the breasts, bottom, legs, midriff and secretly looks into the *Playboy*. This is to me really natural, ’cause a woman is a beautiful creature and I myself believe that really a woman’s body is much more aesthetically pleasing and prettier than a man’s body. (A)

Within the repertoire of “yin and yang”, the admiring of the female body by other women is natural because the female body is beautiful and indeed, this is the most likely reason, rather than being a lesbian, why one woman might stare at another woman.

Somewhat in contradiction to the above narratives is the view expressed by Zofia, which deems women as less appreciative of visually determined traits:

Extract 80

Zofia: But we [men and women] operate in different ways, 'cause we are not as visual, at least so they say. (A)

Zofia acknowledges that her opinion might be just a mainstream false belief. However, more importantly, her account put together with other responses reveals more about these speakers' understanding of the differentiated ways in which women look at other women and men look at women. Women look at other women and see beauty and aesthetic qualities, men look at women primarily to get turned on.

The attractiveness of a woman's body is manifest and enhanced through carefully selected adornment appreciated by naturally more visually turned on male partners:

Extract 81

Nina: Say, I have a boyfriend and I'm wearing a turtleneck top to the university and I do not feel good with this because I know that he is waiting for me and in general, I want to be attractive. I want to have my own sexuality. (A)

For Nina, staying attractive means wearing carefully selected feminine clothes as opposed to a plain and frumpy turtleneck. She views her sexuality as a collection of physical attributes rather than the capacity for sexual feelings towards someone else. Nina feels sexual because she is desired and sexually attractive. Furthermore, she asserts her own sexuality by wearing attractive clothes for her boyfriend's rather than

her own appreciation, as wearing a plain turtleneck top is problematic *because* she is expecting to see him.

According to this repertoire, another plane across which women and men differ is emotionality, especially within the sphere of love and intimacy. Women are the more emotional of the two sexes, therefore the emotional aspects of relationships, rather than mere physical satisfaction, are more important to them than they are to men. Having children and family is also perceived as more important to women than it is to men. Sex is presented as, in general, not as important to women as it is to men, who are more determined by their sexual impulses. However, suitable and responsible male partners are able to control their sexual drives when necessary by using their mind and reasoning. Masculine qualities are not within the realm of physical attractiveness. For a heterosexual woman who perceives men's bodies as less attractive, the attraction that is experienced by her towards men lies beyond their physical attributes. Men constitute the logical, resolute and strong (both emotionally and physically) foundations of the relationships:

Extract 82

Paulina: At least in my opinion, the man should be the stronger pillar of the relationship on which I can lean on, whom I can rely on. (A)

Because within the repertoire of "yin and yang", satisfying relationships are based on complementary opposing biological and psychological traits, they are essentially heterosexual. This also has a specific implication for child rearing. A nuclear family is understood as the norm, whereas homosexuality is not:

Extract 83

Gosia: However um when it comes to children then in my opinion the heterosexual model is such a- the right model, so to say. And children should be brought up within this kind of model. (A)

Many participants speaking from this repertoire believed that homosexuality should be recognised as an orientation preferred by a minority of people and legal and civil partnership rights should be given to couples of the same sex. However, these should not include the right to adoption. The child's upbringing, according to these responses, constituted a special case, where both male and female role models are required for healthy development.

Spark to Be Kindled

According to the third repertoire that I identified, the "spark to be kindled" repertoire, satisfaction in relationships, no matter how initially mutual and strong, is not stable and it requires an on-going maintenance:

Extract 84

Iwona: Surely when- when the child is small, the woman really hasn't got time to look after herself. . . And I think later there comes the time, when she really has time for herself, she can look after herself more and she can rebuild somehow the relations between the two as married partners rather than as parents; that's what I think. (A)

The female partner, whose beauty and physical attractiveness is one of her greatest attributes, sustains the passion within the relationship by maintaining this beauty. Therefore, the women's role is to maintain the satisfaction within the relationship by staying physically attractive and alluring, and keeping the "spark" alight. Within the repertoire of the "spark to be kindled", the personal attractiveness can become a tool in the politics of relationship maintenance:

Extract 85

Nina: And okay, um one should know ones way around men and let's not hide it but um there is some degree of the um subtle game so the man cannot work out the sex appeal that we exude around us. (A)

Extract 86

Ela: Attracting his attention and this is exactly important in these long- long-term relationships it is important to all the time to show him to remind the man that I'm not um an old bicycle ((laughter)) but I am an attractive person ((laughter)). (A)

According to Ela above, womanhood is defined not only by her positioning herself as an attractive person but also by tending to her beauty to stay attractive and therefore keeping the spark alight. The satisfaction requires care and attention and she takes it upon herself to do her part in sustaining the satisfaction by remaining attractive and reminding her man about it. The metaphor was received with laughter because Ela exaggeratedly comparing herself to an inanimate object is at odds with the premises of the repertoire of "exclusive mutuality", according to which satisfaction was sustained by ongoing communication and working things out because it suggests that a woman can

be simply be “forgotten about” if she is not visible. The notion of relationship maintenance by staying attractive is also evident in the Zuza’s response below:

Extract 87

Zuza: This is exactly a question of this working it out with the partner and working out the mutual relations in order to all the time um to make sure that their sexuality is kept alive and also that the woman feels attractive. (A)

Indeed, the sexologist, Michalina Wisłocka in her prominent work entitled, *Sztuka Kochania (The Art of Loving* 1976) devoted many of the pages to the discussion of the different bodily senses and how a woman, through the careful selection of clothes, jewellery and her own sexual attributes, can keep the mutual attraction alive. Wisłocka advises, for example, that “make up should be only applied to these fragments of a woman’s face that enhance its sexual appeal” (60).

Notably, Zuza, unlike Nina in Extract 81, emphasises the importance of the woman *feeling* attractive rather than being perceived as attractive by her boyfriend. The pleasure of feeling attractive enhances Zuza’s sexual well-being and is a means in itself rather than a means to an end. However, Zuza’s account does not disrupt the vision of female sexuality as experienced through being attractive, rather than feeling attraction or desire towards another person. In the cultural setting where a woman’s value is often measured by her physical attributes, the appeal or self-enhancement achieved through attractive clothing is, for Nina and Zuza, a source of positive empowerment and the expression of womanhood.

However, according to the “spark to be kindled” repertoire, on some occasions when relationships are not sufficiently tended to, the spark extinguishes. This situation was, on a few occasions, illustrated by referring to the relationships of the participants’

own parents. In this scenario, not only the couple's mutual attraction diminished but also sexual activity simply became a routine while the partners lost enjoyment or interest in this aspect of their life altogether:

Extract 88

Anna: Okay, my last question, "Is sex important for a woman at all?"

Alicja: Yes!

Anna: Why?

Alicja: Although when I think- when I look at my parents ((laughs out loud)) then I have doubts but for a woman of my- my age, yes it is.

Beata: Especially when one considers couples like- who are married for a longer time when, you know, um surely vigorous erotic lives one leads when one is young. Then the children come, problems start and then husband and wife don't even sleep in the same bed 'cause he snores and she has to get up early to work and then sooner or later this is not a marriage anymore but two strangers who live in the same house and share the fridge. (A)

In these accounts, the future ideal relationships that the speakers aspire to enter into stand in juxtaposition with the perceived relationships of the speakers' parents, which although not necessary unhappy, are described as jaded and "worse for wear". With the existing and aspired relationships juxtaposed like this, the notion of relationship satisfaction gains an aspirational and idealistic dimension because the happy relationship is more of an ambition than a fact.

It is also interesting that being attractive for your long-term boyfriend or husband was constructed across a self-affirming and positive plane, unlike the sexualised behaviours of young women, which aimed to attract the wrong kind of

attention and unhealthy or risky sexual attention from men. Therefore, as I will discuss next, the future ideal relationships were constructed also by the deployment of other contrasts. In the following section I will look closer at the subject positions that are available within the identified interpretative repertoires that offer different discursive locations from which the persons speak and act as well as examine how the available positions were taken up by the participants in this research.

The Subjects of the Romantic Love Discourse

As discussed in the previous chapter, magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* were denounced by many of my informants because they did not reflect the complexity of genuine relationships and focused on sexual skills while neglecting the spiritual aspects of lasting partnerships. Speaking from the repertoire of "exclusive mutuality", many young women I interviewed positioned themselves as the subjects of the romantic love discourse, who were aware what conditions and factors facilitate happy and lasting relationships. They juxtaposed true, authentic love against the misadventures of other women that they knew or women portrayed in the media. For example, Alicja below constructs her identity as an experienced and knowledgeable social actor by distancing herself from the women who "delude themselves". She knows the prerequisites for true affection unlike the other women, whom she knows, who mistook something else for this feeling.

Extract 89

Anna: And when- because this is a very frequent question- When am I ready to have sex? How will I know that I'm ready?

Alicja: I reckon that probably- I don't know, girls delude themselves that they are ready, really. I know this also from personal experience and I believe that

> girls think that- that when they are with the first one- I mean not so much their first boyfriend but with the one that they will lose their virginity with, they are together for some time and they think that they are very much in love and everything is wonderful um and he says that he- when he already said that he loves her then this is some kind of green light ((laughs)). Um but in my opinion this is all really- in my opinion everything starts in the head and first of all one has to accept oneself and when one accepted oneself and when you really feel this true and genuine affection for the other person then this is the right time and it is not a question of age nor, I don't know, that you've been with each other a long time. Um this is very individual. (A)

Alicja speaks from the vantage point of personal experience and seeing her friends having made mistakes. In their experience, losing virginity following their partner's declaration of love indicated the presence of genuine affection but the friends were wrong. Alicja endeavoured not to make a similar mistake. Interesting here is the juxtaposition of agentic self-acceptance against the passive states of receiving the declaration of love or losing virginity. It is what the person feels herself rather than their partner's declaration that signifies the right conditions for the development of the true affection. However, within this narrative of personal autonomy and individuality, satisfaction is still conditional on experiencing a genuine affection towards *another* person. Furthermore, according to Alicja, sexual satisfaction is predicated on love. Following the familiar notion of readiness for love and sex, a question could be also asked regarding Alicja's response as to how exactly self-acceptance, as applied to being ready for sex, will be manifested? Does the self-acceptance relate to feeling good in one's own body that supports the ability to source sexual pleasure, or to a sense of

respectability and the notion of correct sexual conduct (Extract 77) or perhaps to feeling attractive and being perceived as attractive (Extracts 81 and 87)?

Alicja's account speaks to the notion of "something precious being lost" if the wrong line of relationships is being pursued. This could be identified as another interpretative repertoire of the satisfaction in relationships because it represented a global and recurrent feature of participants' accounts. However, I left this repertoire out of the earlier discussion of repertoires because I want to examine it specifically in the context of the participants' identity work. The "something precious is lost" theme is manifest in Milena's and Basia's responses below:

Extract 90

Milena: After seeing the film *Mall Girls* [discussed in the previous chapter] which was here- is- is quite popular at the moment- since some time here in Poland and I was horribly I wa- I watched this film and I felt horribly sorry, I was so sad for these girls 'cause I felt that it shouldn't really be like that 'cause- Sexual initiation is not really about sex for the sex itself at least at the beginning. And if they learn right from the start such um such a connection between sex and pleasure and it's all about that then- then this is not so great and it might um lead to some disorders in the future. Maybe this is a conservative and somewhat old-fashioned approach but sex should be connected in some way with love and affection. (A)

Extract 91

Basia: You are robbed of your dignity somehow through that. Some mystery is torn away when everything is on display, everybody can have access to that, it is

> easy to judge somebody by their looks and I don't think that this is something good. Some kind of demoralisation is brought in, I would even say. (A)

Whereas Basia associated the loss of something precious with the demoralisation brought in by the sexualisation of culture in Poland, Milena identifies this as a more serious and personal risk. This risk is the development of "disorders in the future" and Milena initially "ironizes" her description as "partial, interested, or defective" (Potter 1996, 112). She deploys the rhetorical device of "stake inoculation" (Potter 1996) to signal that it is not her own vested interest or personal opinion after all but something more serious that compels her to support the controversial and contestable claim that she makes. She uses the possibility of the severe outcome, such as potential disorders, to disqualify the charge of being seen as too old-fashioned for thinking that women should not have sex for pleasure only and in the absence of love.

In the process of building credibility for her claims, Milena constructs the identity for herself as somebody sensible, responsible and informed. Milena expresses sadness on behalf of the girls portrayed in the film because they missed the important opportunity to learn and experience sex within the context of a special, reciprocal relationship. Learned association between sex and physical pleasure in the absence of a meaningful relationship might, according to Milena, lead to problems in the future. Milena positions herself outside the discourse of sex only for pleasure or money. This positioning is self-affirming because, unlike her, these women who are swayed by the new popular trends or "easy" financial rewards do not realise or do not care about the negative consequences that await them. Milena's awareness about the necessity to connect sex with genuine love means that she can be spared these negative outcomes.

The narratives of risk threaded through many other responses given by the young women that I interviewed and risk was constructed in a multitude of ways beside

the danger of disorders. These outcomes for other women included being a subject of ridicule (Extract 92), or a victim eliciting dangerous behaviours from men (Extract 93), which included "provoking" criminal acts (Extract 94), or simply a naive girl for one night spoiling her prospects for getting married (Extract 95):

Extract 92

Dorota: This is again mostly the problem that affects teenagers, 'cause people of my age are rather more- 'cause the outlook on life changes but this appeals to some fifteen- seventeen-year-olds and they dress like this and can, for example, I don't know, put their picture in and later regret this 'cause they are wearing no clothes in it. (A)

Extract 93

Zofia: For a man certain behaviours or certain clothes were a total "okay" for a lot and at least I myself came across many younger girls at the age of gymnasium, who were surprised, that "she wanted to be cool" and certainly she wanted to arouse sexual interest in the boys that she knew or even men but she thought that this would be the end of it, that she would be dancing, they would be looking and she would feel cool. But what I mean is that she didn't- she certainly knew what feelings she would arise but she was not aware that this was received as the acquiescence, as a "yes". (A)

Extract 94

Beata: And this is very common mostly amongst teenage girls and this is very worrying because they are not completely aware what is the sexuality for and in

some way they do not suspect that they are provoking for example criminal acts. (A)

Extract 95

Basia: Walking around Kraków this is very noticeable especially at night ((laughs)). On the one hand there is some approval especially from men, I think they like girls like these. But I think that these are so-called girls for one night, for a short while but really when a man wants to settle down he looks for a stereotypical Polish woman that cooks, loves and gives cuddles rather than an outgoing one. Because such a woman that is easy to lose 'cause very likely she is not going to be faithful, I think men think like this. (A)

Although all of the above accounts construct the "something precious lost" in different ways, the self-positionings are done through the utility of the contrast with the "other". As in the narratives examined in two previous chapters, the speakers above position other women as the subjects of certain discourses while positioning themselves explicitly as not affected by the same corruptive trends. Notably also, all speakers in the above accounts qualify their claims by reference to various potential negative outcomes that await the women they describe. These participants acknowledge the existence of conflicting modes of behaviour but they themselves – as sensible, informed and autonomous individuals – identify and avoid the risky ones. The modes of behaviour chosen by the participants not only avoid risks but are also the ones that lay foundations and prospects for happy and satisfying relationships based on reciprocity and authentic, true love.

The associated repertoires construct very polarised portrayals of women in Poland. They could be either misguided or clever in their acceptance of set rules. The

development of disorders being given as a possible outcome of certain sexual behaviours resonates with the discourse of medical texts, such as *The Art of Loving*, and on a couple of occasions these were explicitly identified by the participants as something that influenced their opinions. However, if girls' fascination with hyper-sexualised styles is just a phase of youth, how seriously should we take the interpretations of something precious being lost, especially the ones suggesting the possibility of disorders? In view of the above questions, it is also interesting that, more often than not, the other women described by the participants were not the women they themselves knew but the "cases" portrayed by the media.

The Dominance of the Romantic Love Discourse

It is not difficult to see from the preceding sections of this analysis that the constructions of satisfaction in relationships as based on exclusive mutuality, special affection and understanding strongly resonate with the discourse of romantic love. Indeed, the romantic love discourse threaded through both the texts analysed in this work and the conversations with participants. Today when the content of *Bravo* magazines, which constituted a sexual learning source for the informants in this research, is not as novel and sensational, a new brand of Polish romantic love discourse surfaces from the world of never-ending Polish soap operas, films and sophisticated glossy magazines such as *Twój Styl*. For example, in the film entitled *Nigdy w Życiu* (Never in My Life 2004), the female lead protagonist blissfully carries through a mundane relationship, each morning passing an ironed shirt and packed lunch to her husband while working also as a full-time journalist for a magazine. One day her husband leaves her for a younger woman. After the initial shock, she uses this event as an impetus to become an independent woman and buys a piece of land in the country to have a house built on it. As the title of the film suggests, the heroine swears never again

to become romantically involved with a man. However, what becomes a major twist is her breaking that promise upon meeting a man who is so different from her former husband; romantic, handsome, assertive *and* respectful of her independence – "he promised not to read my e-mails". This is a modern fairy tale whose main message is that financial independence and career is not complete without the right man in your life. It is noteworthy that the script of the above film not only draws on the discourse of romantic love but on the repertoire that deems this love as fragile and unstable. Here, the problem of fleeting satisfaction is resolved with the benefit of hindsight, which shows that if the passion is gone this probably was not the right man or the right relationship but the chance is that the next one will be the one.

The satisfaction founded on the egalitarianism of heterosexual relationships connotes the assumed gender equality discourse popularised during the socialist era in Poland. Despite the transformation of the political system, women's participation in education and the labour market remains very high in Poland (as it was discussed Chapter Three). It is no surprise, therefore, that women who anticipate equality in the economic spheres of life would also base their understandings of relationships on the notion of equality. Egalitarian relationships also mean sharing of domestic and child-rearing responsibilities, although the participants in this research still viewed this as something that is a challenge and something that modern couples are still learning about and aspire to. Indeed, some commentators believe that the sharing of child-rearing responsibilities for many couples in Poland is a reality and what is stopping some partners adopting this model is the fear by women of separation with the child and losing control. In a *Twój Styl* article entitled, "Pozwól Mu Być Ojcem" (Let Him Be a Father, Cichocka 2010), two child psychologists discuss the reasons behind women's excessive need of control and the benefits of "letting go" in order to facilitate the father's involvement with the children.

According to the interpretative repertoire of "exclusive mutuality" both women and men aspire to lasting and monogamous heterosexual relationships. This is unlike the have/hold discourse defined by Wendy Hollway in 1984, which asserts that men are forcefully drawn into committed relationships somewhat against their own will and their masculine nature. However, as I have already pointed out in Chapter Five, more contemporary literature suggests that the picture around binary expectations regarding romantic love is more complex than the dichotomy portrayed by the have/hold discourse. At the same time, the repertoires of "exclusive mutuality" and "yin and yang" speak to the discourse of have/hold, not only by stipulating that the most appropriate context for sex are long-term relationships but also by viewing women and men as having different investments in sex versus romantic love. These repertoires, like the have/hold discourse, view women as comparatively asexual creatures who see sex as a means to an end. This end is keeping the man and therefore sustaining the monogamous relationship and having children. With the have/hold discourse there comes invariably the male sexual drive discourse, which constructs men's motivation for remaining in relationships as mainly based on a sexual need and attraction where women are objects of desire that needs to be sustained. Nicola Gavey (2005, 104) notes that this notion illustrates, "clearly male sexual drive discourse and the ways it constructs male sexuality as active and desiring, and women's sexuality as implicitly without desire, existing perhaps only as the object of male desire".

Indeed, the claims made by Nicola Gavey echo the construction of female sexuality by some participants in this research. Feminine beauty was a feature of both the "yin and yang" and "spark to be kindled" repertoires. The characteristic that women contributed to the mutual attraction was their beauty and the maintenance thereof also helped to sustain passion. The analysis of the conversations about women's investment in romantic heterosexual relationships prompted my question, if it is not at all physical

characteristics that attract women to men – given that they can appreciate them in other contexts – what is it? The responses suggest that it is being and being seen as attractive and desired that is a source of satisfaction, fulfilment and empowerment for women. This is polarised, gendered and restrictive understanding of both female and male sexuality. Women who are sexually attracted to men because of the men's bodily characteristics, women who wish to be admired not for their bodily characteristics but the achievements and skills outside the sphere of romantic love, men who are not sexually motivated to enter romantic relationships and men who cannot or do not wish to be logical, resolute and strong (both emotionally and physically) foundations of heterosexual partnerships, are the groups that do not fit into the above defined repertoires of satisfaction in relationships.

Within the understandings of the egalitarianism of relationships which draw on discourses of binary characteristics this egalitarianism is, therefore, undercut in some crucial ways. Firstly, gender equality – including the equal right to sexual pleasure and satisfaction – is enacted within the context of a relationship with a compatible partner, rather than through individual capacities, actions or achievements. Secondly, female sexuality is constructed as the quality of being desired, which not only once again is precluded upon a possession of a desiring partner but it also eschews the pleasures of being oneself a desiring actor. Thirdly, if emotionality is a "natural" characteristic that women possess, and intellect and rationality are attributed to men, how can these potentially conflicting traits be reconciled in successful problem-solving conversations? It is also worth noting that the repudiation of the same-sex model as a model where children could be raised embraces the gender binary model in yet another way by stressing that normal child development requires exposure to both "feminine" and "masculine" sets of attributes and characteristics.

The process of construction of gender has been a subject of a long-standing and contested scholarly inquiry. Judith Butler (1990, 43, emphasis in original) who is perhaps the most prominent theorist of the topic, argues that gender identities and their bodily categories are founded on "parodic" practices, that is, the practices that "parody the *idea* of the natural and the original". These gender attributes are not "expressive but performative". They "effectively constitute the identity they are said to express" (192). Butler argues further:

> That gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity and femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender's performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality. (Butler 1990, 192–193)

Therefore, the gender-differentiated traits that were understood by the participants that I interviewed as contributing to the complementarity of romantic relationships are an artefact. These accepted and expected gender binary features, attitudes and behaviours are also a part of a restrictive framework that includes only very narrow definitions of femininity and masculinity. The pertinent question is, for example, if relationship satisfaction is based on emotional connection and intellectual understanding between partners, why female beauty remains important within this equation? If this version of beauty is not as youth contingent as its mass media alternative, is it therefore less fragile? This, in turn, poses another question, namely, can relationships stay happy, mutually satisfying and faithful and if they do, do they continue to source the satisfaction from good sex, physical attractiveness and attraction? It is also noteworthy that the definitions of female beauty here are not the ones highly visible in the media and associated with female sexualisation but are rather based specifically on a middle-class notion of sophisticated, well-groomed, smartly-dressed

ideal of female attractiveness. However, the distinction between smartly attractive or sexy and sexualised is fluid and subjective. For example, the definitions of female beauty described by Wisłocka might have been appropriate when the book was first published but today they might appear as outdated and conservative.

The participants' constructions of satisfaction in relationships and the notion of egalitarianism that underpins them are based on some further taken-for-granted but problematic assumptions, which stipulate behaviours and attitudes that, although generally accepted and expected, might prove difficult to follow in practice (Langan and Davidson 2010). These assumptions of what Debra Langan and Deborah Davidson call "intimacy discourse" include: the understanding that people in love should be sexually attracted to one another and vice versa, the belief that intimacy is restricted to romantic relationships and sexual activity to monogamous relationships, as well as the notion that being physically close is necessary for intimacy. However, as Langan and Davidson point out:

> While Intimacy Discourse perpetuates idealized notions of family, and romantic couple relationships more generally, as locations for us to seek refuge, it fails to acknowledge the broader societal contexts in which these exist. (Langan and Davidson 2010, 29)

Indeed, the tone of idealism characterised the repertoires of satisfaction in relationships where the relationships described were the future relationships that the speakers aspired to, rather than the existing relationships of their parents. The narratives of satisfaction in relationships tend to focus on romance rather than the further stages of romantic partnerships that remain opaque under the notion of "happily ever after". Margaret Wetherell encapsulates this vividly in her description of textual sources rather than spoken narratives, which nevertheless is very relevant to illustrate my point:

> [Romantic] texts represent, first, the closing of emotional ambivalence. The desire is for a movement away from contingency towards unity and towards an emotional paradise of reciprocity and certainty. Romance is also, literally, the story which very frequently ends all stories. (Wetherell 1995, 132)

Perhaps for the Polish participants in this research the ideal of exclusive, mutual and heterosexual romance that underpinned their narratives speaks to the powerful legacy of nuclear family in Poland. This type of family is not only inscribed in Poland into religious morality but is also understood as the primary self-fulfilment goal and the central source of emotional support. As Ewa Siderenko (2000) points out, Polish national identities are firmly embedded within the private sphere of home, family and religion, because this is where, during the decades of intrusive and corrupt state socialism, many Polish people found a safe haven.

Conclusion

Exclusive mutuality based on genuine affection, understanding, egalitarianism where this special bond is consummated through genital intercourse, is one of the interpretative repertoires that participants drew on to furnish their understanding of satisfaction in lasting heterosexual relationships. The satisfaction was also based on the notion of attraction underpinned by binary but complementary gender characteristics. The subject self-positionings discussed in this chapter were predominantly achieved through the rhetoric device of contrast and disassociation with others where risk and sensibility informed codes of sexual respectability were often embraced. I have argued that the interpretative repertoires of satisfaction in relationships include narrow definitions of female and male sexuality and sexual expression. The tone of idealism once again characterised the speakers' accounts, which oscillated around relationships' aspirations rather than existing partnerships. The following chapter will explore how

the participants who were recruited through online feminist discussion groups constructed their identity as feminists within the context of challenges presented by the transforming political and social landscape of Poland.

Chapter Nine

Feminist Identities in Poland

Introduction

> One woman visits another woman and praises a man. This is a hidden meaning of the *Magnificat*, a canticle often confused with the hymn in veneration of Holy Mary. In reality there is no one word in it that worships the Mother of God, it is Mary herself who praises the Lord to her cousin, Elizabeth (the mother of John the Baptist). One pregnant woman instructs another pregnant woman how to show the gratitude to the one who "gave her the child" (because the mother to be does not "have" but "bears" a child for somebody). For the authors of the project entitled "The Choir of Women – Project II: Magnificat" this hidden meaning of the text constitutes not only a poetic metaphor. According to them, this is exactly what the relations between women in Poland look like. Zero solidarity, zero support, only the mutual instructing in how to fulfil men's expectations. And this model leads to the majority of social problems: from the phenomenon of the mall girls to the attitude of the female MPs who supported the outright abortion in the last voting. . . . "Praise the Lord" the accusation, trial and verdict in one. Because what is there to praise for? For the servile role in the Church, at work and in one's own bedroom? For the Sunday sermons on how to bear one's cross? For Nigella Lawson, who, as we all know, "bites, licks and sucks", turning cooking on the screen into another sexual favour performed for the benefit of male audience?
> (From *Gazeta Wyborcza* "Praise the Lord? Never in our Lives", Derkaczew 2011, 17)

I inserted this long quote here because it illustrates the specific and diverse challenges for women's right activism in Poland; the powerful legacy of the Roman Catholic Church, including its projected role for women in the Polish society, and the trends of global neo-liberalism that dominate many newly emergent media since the change of the political system. This chapter is the last chapter devoted to the analysis of the interviews with the participants and here I explore how some participants positioned themselves vis-à-vis the dominant discourses of feminism in Poland. More specifically, this chapter is concerned with how these participants constructed their identities as feminists, despite and against the negative connotations that the notion of "a feminist"

invokes in Poland. This forms the focus of the third and last section of this chapter. In the first two sections I discuss, looking specifically at the Polish cultural context, how and why feminism has a bad reputation and why it is considered inappropriate and redundant.

"I'm Not a Feminist But…": Feminism's "Ugly" Label

Feminism in Poland, as in other locations, has a bad reputation. The bad reputation of the label is to some degree due to its "unfeminine" connotations. According to this discursive trope, being a feminist negates being beautiful or even well groomed because "a feminist" denotes an unkempt woman and a lesbian, who does not care about her appearance because she does not care about men. In other words, feminism is perceived as an opposition, not only to femininity but also feminine beauty. The repudiation of feminism on the grounds of its association with unfeminine and man-hating lesbianism is not unique to Poland and has been observed by other researchers, such as Christina Scharff (2009) who noted similar beliefs amongst some women in Germany and United Kingdom. Some earlier research also revealed that although the generally defined feminist goals of equality are perceived as reasonable, feminists are at the same time viewed as "extreme and monstrous" (Edley and Wetherell 2001).

These negative appraisals around feminism's apparent disregard for or even hatred of the feminine are not only voiced by those hostile to feminism and even some feminists blame feminism's bad press on its apparent denouncement of the ideal of female beauty. For example, Agnieszka Graff (2001, 196) believes that "the tendency to persecute women who do not want to relinquish the attributes of traditionally understood femininity is one of the great mistakes of feminism". "I like pralines and I like visiting the beauty salon" she contends. However, other feminist commentators,

such as Naomi Wolf (1991), argue that the problem is not feminine beauty per se but the restrictive beauty imperative. Therefore, they believe, it is not feminism that persecutes and antagonises women but the oversimplified definitions of what constitutes beautiful and feminine and how these might be exclusive or even oppressive for those women who cannot or do not want to fit the attributes of traditionally understood femininity. Naomi Wolf points out that the seemingly banal dilemma of cosmetics and pralines is more insidious that it appears:

> The problem with cosmetics exists only when women feel invisible or inadequate without them. . . . Women will be able to thoughtlessly adorn ourselves with pretty objects when there is no question that *we* are not objects. Women will be free of the beauty myth when we can choose to use our faces and clothes and bodies as simply one form of self-expression out of a full range of others. (Wolf 1991, 273–274, emphasis in original)

According to a report prepared by the Polish feminist organisations (Tarasiewicz and Walczewska 2005), even female politicians are perceived in Polish media from the spectrum of their bodily characteristics, with innuendoes and allusions to sex often being made. The relentless focus on bodily presentation permeating all genres of media means that, "[w]omen do remarkably well on the picture count in newspapers, but . . . visibility is not the same thing as power" (Sands 2012, 15). Viewing a woman from the perspective of her appearance or bodily and sexual characteristics means that we no longer have to take her or her words seriously (Wolf 1991). Therefore, this seemingly straightforward issue, according to Graff, has much deeper implications and it understandably poses one of the greatest challenges for feminist activism, not only in Poland.

"There Is Equality and There Will Be": Local (Post)feminism

> I met many women who destroyed men. You are stronger. In the nineties, you burst out of communism; looking good and knowing things. And guys? Still overweight, fat beer bellies with moustaches.
> From the interview with Jacek Poniedziałek, one of the first openly gay Polish actors (Kuc and Pustoła 2010, 57)

Agnieszka Graff (2003, 100; emphasis in original) argues that, "Polish feminism resists the chronology of 'waves': it uses styles and tactics characteristic of the third wave (irony, high theory, camp, cross-dressing, etc.) to achieve typically second wave aims (reproductive rights, equal pay, etc.) It then engages with a historical paradox: the phenomenon of backlash *before* feminism". Indeed, a British researcher into feminist movements in Eastern Europe, Rosalind Marsh observes:

> When I began to work on this subject my initial impression was that the pre-feminist ideas prevalent in the media in Central and Eastern Europe and the former USSR bore an uncomfortable resemblance to current 'post-feminist' views in the Western media. (Marsh 2009, 40)

To disentangle these confusing accounts of pre-feminism, post-feminism or anti-feminism it is important to return to the ideas described in Chapter Three and the legacy of apparent gender equality that existed within the socialist era. According to some, Polish women never needed feminism because they were already equal and the introduction of the western feminist rhetoric is simply not applicable or jars with this unique Polish reality. This attitude might be associated with the lack of awareness about women's unique needs as a minority and oppressed group, as illustrated by a Polish feminist activist, Anna Lipowska-Teutsch, who recounts the time when she first became aware of the *gendered* nature of the problems that some women in Poland face:

> [T]his was the time of martial law in Poland. . . . And I remember that I said something like that to Marzena Smolenska [Polish feminist friend who lives in Italy], that well, that I believed that feminism was some sort of a marginal

> phenomenon, that important problems were elsewhere, that important problems were related to people's inability to effectively work together – women, men, children, all genders and age groups – to resist human rights violations against all people, that this had some universal value, and that there was nothing like that here. But it was also in the 80s, when I started having these personal experiences. I mean personal in a sense that they were related to my work, where I began to notice some amazing stories of women, stories that had been completely invisible to me before. These were women who showed up in the Acute Poisoning Clinic after suicide attempts and who had suffered some inhuman kind of abuse by their husbands, fathers, brothers, boyfriends and so on for many years. And finally they tried to take their own lives, because for many years, they had been seeking help, trying to escape, trying to get some protection from the law, trying really hard but to no avail. (Lipowska-Teutsch 2005, 4)

Lipowska-Teutsch's account echoes my own experiences. My first encounter with feminism was when I was still living in Poland. In the first year after completing secondary school, I managed to secure a place on a one-month residential course in Amsterdam organised by a Dutch feminist organisation to encourage feminist initiatives and business enterprise amongst professional women in Poland. During a preliminary meeting in Warsaw, I learned for the first time that a feminist was simply "somebody who believed in equal rights for women". At that time, this, admittedly reductive, definition seemed to make perfect sense to me and I was astounded that I had not come across it before. Prior to this event I did not have any interest in or indeed explicit awareness about feminism as a stance or source of identification. The participation in the camp was free and it was a generous offer on behalf of this feminist organisation based in Amsterdam. However grateful the Polish women who participated in the course were for this opportunity, most of them repeatedly insisted that they did not need feminism as they all worked full-time anyway.

Today, when the awareness about the existence of feminism as a possible stance is unparalleled in Poland, the repudiation thereof is often expressed more emphatically. And while some commentators do not actively oppose feminism, they nevertheless believe that, "the rights that feminists fight for are often imagined" because "there is

equality and there always will be" (Bartosiak and Klinke 2007, 86). Therefore – unlike within the idea of the backlash where feminism is viewed in terms of its failures (Faludi 1992) or as in the Polish sense the threat to the national identity – according to this understanding, the struggle for gender equality is consigned to the past and already successfully resolved.

The neo-liberal trends within the new Polish media reveal a similar attitude towards the status of gender equality in Poland. For example, according to the advertising trailer of the popular Polish film, *Lejdis* (Ladies 2008), "It is commonly known that modern women do not have to ask for anything anymore, they take it themselves." However, many participants that I recruited through feminist discussion forums disparaged the above view. They lamented the post-feminist sensibilities visible within Polish culture and one of them, Joanna, noted that, "we are far from post-feminism, very far", understanding post-feminism as a situation where feminism is not longer needed because genuine – rather than implied – gender equality has been achieved.

The Uneasy and Polarised Definition of a Feminist

Some commentators in Poland believe what might be perceived as feminist in Poland is confused by the diversity of women's organisations with divergent goals and sometimes conflicting understanding of women's needs. Izabela Palińka (2011, 44–45; my emphasis) argues in the Polish feminist magazine *Zadra*, that while some organisations supported by European Union have explicit gender equality agendas and their objectives converge with feminist goals in about "eighty per cent of cases", in reality, they are pseudo-feminist. This is because for these organisations, feminism is associated with the "women's needs" that are always interpreted according to ready-made and stereotyped cultural schemas. Such organisations provide "workshops of

personal development for women" and "training courses for women on how to change a tyre" as well as, "hand out discount vouchers for cosmetics and visits in beauty salons". They organise "conferences to support 'business on high heels'". Their objectives follow the logic that "we all differ so beautifully" and attempt to dispel the notion that women are less valuable than men. Palińka points out however, it is "the diversity and uniqueness that is the natural and inherent characteristic of being *human*, not the state of being better or worse". Palińka understands feminism as a stance that aims to undermine the masculinist yardstick of humanity against which all individuals are to be measured.

The term "feminist" is complicated further by the reality where there exist a number of highly visible "women's issues" organisations which disassociate themselves from or actively oppose what is generally understood as feminism. This means that in Poland it is possible to be involved within the generally understood women's issues or women's rights agenda without subscribing to feminist ideals. As a Polish feminist activist, Małgorzata Fuszara (2005) argues even pro-life organisations in Poland often refer to themselves as "women's organisations" and there are a number of women's NGOs who operate under the auspices of the Catholic Church. The Polish *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (Law and Justice Party), which is a major right wing, conservative party of Poland, organised the 2011 Congress of the Women of the Right. Sylwia Ługowska, who is one of the party's popular activists (which some attribute to her attractive appearance) when asked by *Super Express*, the Polish leading tabloid, about her apparent dislike for feminism, replied:

> This word is associated with the left. Our meeting was attended by women who do not run to the demos. These were intelligent, well-educated women with opinions but also views that are not dissimilar from the ideals of our party.
> *Are there any matters that you have in common with feminists?*
> I have never paid much attention to feminists but the fight for women's dignity is a common goal.

> *Feminists, amongst others, understand women's dignity as the right to abortion.* If feminist understand dignity in such a way, then this is their problem. (*Super Express* 2011)

The need to position oneself and others, either as a controversial feminist or somebody against feminism, with nothing in-between, not only does disservice to gender equality agenda but also obscures the diversity of meanings that feminism and pro-women values have for those individuals who do not categorise themselves as feminists (Griffin 1989). Susan Condor (1986; cited in Griffin 1989, 182) who conducted a research with women who identified themselves as traditional and anti-feminists cautions against making of the unproblematic distinction between traditional women and feminists. Condor argues that while her participants were predominantly anti-feminist, they upheld traditionally feminine values and were pro-women. They did not necessarily view women and femininity as negative with respect to men and masculinity and held most masculine qualities in low esteem.

Another reason why many women might not want to call themselves feminists could also be located in a very particular but not necessary adversative understanding of what feminism really is. For example, Karolina Zagrodna (2011, 65), the columnist for the women's section of the *Cooltura*, the Polish-language magazine published weekly in the United Kingdom wrote, "Probably I am not a feminist but I am up for the fight for the things we care about. Hefner's Bunnies don't bother me at all, let them be. I'm too old to worry about the blondes." Zagrodna defines feminists as the activists campaigning publicly against the re-establishment of the Playboy club in London. Therefore, for some, a feminist equals an activist and in the Polish context this even more specifically denotes an activist who attends the annual feminist demonstrations. This opinion based on the (mis)understanding that one cannot be a feminist simply by the virtue of one's beliefs points to the notion that there is no consensus on the

definition of feminism. It also indicates that, "[t]here is not one feminism but many, the concept is under a continual process of negotiation, and for most women, the identification of oneself as a feminist is not a straightforward process" (Griffin 1989, 174).

"I'm Normal, I Shave My Legs": Feminist Self-Presentation

It could be argued that the construction of feminists in binary terms might be easier in the context where feminism is relatively faceless, that is, where women talked about as feminists are hypothetical, abstract and the unnamed "other". However, the understanding of feminism as positioned on one end of a polarised scale persists in the settings where the face of a feminist is known. For example, in Polish media, feminists, because of their perceived controversial position, are often invited by journalists to participate in discussions around the issues of gender and sexuality to be confronted by equally "extreme" opponents. Thus, feminists are often allowed to air their opinions but only in the context when they are pitched against another opposing voice. It is therefore important to stress again that the participants recruited through student networking sites that did not align themselves explicitly with feminist agenda during the interviews, might not have done so because they did not wish to position themselves as a feminist portrayed by the popular media in Poland. And as I have argued above, feminism does not represent a neat and coherent phenomenon and the term feminist does not denote a unitary category. Therefore, women who do not associate themselves with feminism should not be dismissed as complicit in their own oppression as, "this overlooks the reasons for their denial of an explicit feminist allegiance" (Griffin 1989, 181).

In this section I examine the discursive and rhetorical strategies that were deployed by my informants in the process of feminist identity construction. Given the "ugly" reputation of feminism based on extreme binaries, the self-identification as a

feminist poses a continued challenge for women who chose to proclaim themselves as feminists. In a situation where feminism is perceived as a controversial, extreme or even militant option, any comments and opinions that are vaguely associated with or traced to feminism can be automatically mocked and denigrated because nobody ultimately wants to be seen as an "unpalatable aficionado of feminism" (a term used once by the *Independent* in an article promoting Adam Jukes' book entitled, *Why Men Hate Women*, Neustatter 1993). Therefore, for many self-declared feminists this self-declaration might pose "identity trouble" (Wetherell 1998) because their identity performances assume pejorative ideological associations. Indeed, many self-declared feminist participants that I interviewed expressed their dismay at being seen as femininity defying abnormal outsiders. This identity, which was constructed for them by others, was denounced by these participants and reconstructed as an informed and discerning stance that understands the state of gender relations in Poland.

Many narratives that attempted to reconstruct and rehabilitate the feminist identity considered and played with the notion of "normal" and "moderate" rather than "extreme" as it is perceived by others (Edley and Wetherell 2001):

Extract 96

Aldona: No, I am normal, I like children, I shave my legs, shave my armpits, yes, and I wash ((laughs)). (B)

Aldona uses self-reflective irony to show that despite the "freakish" unfeminine image ascribed to feminists, in her case, her feminist beliefs do not disrupt her femininity or what is considered as normal women's behaviour in Poland. Aldona declares to like children and in an earlier response she revealed that she was planning to get married. She thus dismantles the notion that men are not attracted to feminists as evidenced by

the joke, “What’s the difference between a feminist and a bin-liner? A bin-liner gets taken out at least once a week.” (quoted in Griffin 1989, 173). Later on, Aldona further interrogates the notion of normativity and argues that what is deemed normal, “the Catholic national spirit”, is deemed as such not because it is an act of choice but because “we are suffused with it” and it is taken for granted. What is considered normal is really the illusion of normality that everybody is expected to aspire to and she, thanks to the advantage of her feminist knowledge, recognises the problems brought by this artificially imposed demands of normativity. Thus, she facilitates a self-presentation that is not merely moderate but also “‘socially aware’, ‘egalitarian’ and ‘progressive’” (Stapleton 2001, 482):

> **Extract 97**
>
> **Aldona:** One can see that we are really brought up in the Catholic national spirit and everything that comes with it and we are suffused with it. And it is very difficult then it is difficult when we have different views and believe that, for example, one sex or both sexes really are discriminated. And I don’t believe that this will change any time soon in this country. (B)

Aldona and Justyna (below) position themselves both as members of Polish Catholic community and the feminist movement and acknowledge the possible conflict between these two identities. This conflict, however, is not of their own making but something imposed by other people who do not understand what the feminist struggle is really about. For Aldona and Justyna also, “the notion of ‘gender stereotyping’ [or more appropriately here ‘gender discrimination’] functions as both a sense-making and an identity-resource” (Stapleton 2001, 469):

Extract 98

Justyna: I'm considered a Catholic, I was christened, my wedding will be in the church but I must admit I don't attend church very often, I don't agree with all the beliefs so really I should be excluded from the Church. But surely I don't believe that a woman who has sex outside marriage, one who does not want to get married and probably will have many partners in her life is, I don't know, bad. I think that the society gives this right to men but continues to take it away from women. (B)

Within the "gender discrimination" repertoire, "[c]onventional expectations of femininity/masculinity are consistently formulated as a negative social force, with particularity injurious consequences for women. Thus [this repertoire] is used to account for various social phenomena and biographical experiences" (Stapleton 2001, 469–470).

Indeed, as I have discussed in Chapter Seven, biographical narratives were frequently used by the participants to enhance the truth-status and illustrate their claims about prejudiced gender relations in Poland. For example, Renata in Extract 18 and Joanna in Extract 35 described how the information about sexual matters which their mothers withheld from them was not just a result of their embarrassment but it involved the censoring of knowledge that might have resulted in morally inappropriate sexual conduct. Similarly, in Agnieszka's account, the personal tale serves as a backdrop and the stimulus for the feminist identification taken on later by her:

Extract 99

Agnieszka: I remember when I was a teenager it was very important to me this- for a very long time I um struggled with the notion of an indecent woman, a whore, yes exactly, a whore. And finally after many years of emotional- I don't know how to say it. Somehow I went through it in my head and rejected it totally. I decided that this is a manifestation of the double moral standard towards men and women and I felt better once I rejected it and did not apply it. So there is no such term for me at all, such as a fallen woman. (B)

Agnieszka's feminist identity is built upon the notion of "having done one's homework" regarding the double standard of differential attitudes towards sexual conduct of men and women. And, as within the interpretative repertoire of "the McDonaldization of Poland" discussed in Chapter Seven, where confessional narratives of past naivety were used to bolster the present identity as a rational, articulate and discerning media consumer, here the feminist identity work is achieved by constructing oneself as an enlightened individual informed by hindsight, political savviness and educated self-reflection. This identity involves making active choices to not read "these papers" (Extract 54) or reject the notion of indicant woman (Extract 99) versus passively accepting set beliefs around femininity and sexuality.

Other rhetorical strategies that characterised the feminist identity construction were the use of metaphor and emphatic, end-of-scale descriptive vocabulary. These strategies were especially evident within the accounts that denounced the restrictive vision of femininity promoted by some newly emergent women's magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*. In this context, these magazines are specifically repudiated as a site of gender discrimination. For example, Dagmara reflected on a university project where

she was asked to create “A portrait of a modern woman” using cut-outs from newspapers and women’s magazines:

Extract 100

Dagmara: It was a horror, nothing could be found. A modern woman according to these magazines consists of clothes, shoes, cosmetics, some cream to improve something and other things that exist in order to satisfy her guy. (B)

The use of the word “horror” in Dagmara’s response is paralleled by the word “terrifying” in Marta’s response regarding the portrayals of sexual relations in the *Cosmopolitan*. Marta’s claims are further qualified by the use of powerful analogy where women are metaphorically compared to animals in a slaughterhouse:

Extract 101

Anna: And this ideal of a woman, in sexual relations in *Cosmo*?

Marta: It is terrifying, for me it is terrifying. I remember, every year they, I don’t know if they are doing this still, but for some time every year they were doing this, how to say it, quiz and were asking, I don’t know if they really were asking women or the editors just sat down and made it all up but there were apparently interviews with different men, ordinary men on the street what they want the most from sex and what excites them the most for a woman do to. And this is apparently so liberated but in reality this was an instruction how to be a doll, an instruction how to be some kind of- This is, I believe the advice how to be, I don’t know, advice for a pig in a slaughterhouse, “And at the end if you don’t want to become a sausage then you don’t need to do it”. (B)

In this narrative, the "McDonaldization" repertoire, or indeed "it's just the media" repertoire (Wetherell 1996), is mobilised not only to emphasise that the speaker is not fooled by the magazines but also to debunk the post-feminist notion that these magazines are in any way a source of the empowerment for women. And although some respondents lamented being perceived as an out-group and emphasised that the feminist identification does not need to denote the dispensing with femininity or the denouncement of heterosexual marriage, they themselves constructed their own identities in opposition and against the identity of "the other". In doing so, they implicitly accepted the terms of the debate they had previously rejected. Aldona, for example, talks about girls adopting the ideal of female sexuality based on hyper-sexualised modes of dress and behaviour that were discussed in Chapter Seven:

Extract 102

Aldona: For me this is not an ideal of female sexuality at all because here they are always objects when they do not experience this themselves. So let's say, this is an ideal of sexuality without sexuality. (B)

The use of "they" by Aldona indicates that other women who take up the ideal of female sexuality promoted by the magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* are trapped within the false consciousness which prevents them from developing and experiencing *subjective* and authentic forms of sexuality. Similarly, Renata in Extract 54 quoted in Chapter Seven, positioned herself *against* the "huge mass who buys these here". Women, understood as duped magazine readers or misguided teenagers, are both a target and the potential beneficiaries of feminism because despite the disparaged and ridiculed status of feminism, it is a standpoint that possesses the key to the problem of this false consciousness.

Therefore, the notion of polarisation between feminist consciousness and an ordinary woman's identity, when she embraces the sexualised, media-promoted model of femininity – or indeed traditional roles set out by the Church – is upheld also by the women who identify themselves with the former. These constructions are characterised by the idealism that reductively positions women who enjoy magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* or adopt dress styles and behaviours perceived as sexualised as non-feminist or anti-feminist, without giving a consideration to these women's own opinions about the issue at hand. These constructions also do not engage with the possible reasons why these magazines and dress styles are enjoyed. And as the research literature around women's magazines (Winship 1987; Douglas 1995; McRobbie 1996; Ussher 1997) that I reviewed in Chapter Two and a commentary around sexualisation in Poland (Pągowska 2010) cited in Chapter Seven revealed, these reasons range from mundane to those that have been considered as the positive expressions of female sexual subjectivity. It is also important to note that some participants repudiated sexualised dress styles and behaviours for reasons other than them being antithetical to feminist identity, namely, because they disrupted the prospect for developing happy, lasting heterosexual relationships. I will discuss this further in the concluding chapter, Chapter Ten, of this work.

Conclusion

In this chapter I explored identity work in conversations with the participants who identified themselves with the feminist standpoint. I showed that the challenges for feminism in Poland include not only the association of feminism with the un-feminine, the anti-feminist backlash or the notion that feminism is no longer necessary because it already achieved its objectives but also the tendency to define feminism in polarised, all-or-nothing terms. Another obstacle to wider recognition and acceptance

for feminism in Poland is the perception of feminists as the "othered" group who is involved in loud but predictable activism with annual demonstrations and occasional articles in the leftist newspapers. The view that feminists are over the top, unfeminine and men-hating poses a difficult dilemma for feminist identification and the feminist informants in this study denounced the notion that feminist means abnormal, positioning themselves not only as feminists but also as members of the community of women in Poland. The interpretative repertoire of "gender discrimination" served both as a sense-making device and an identity-resource. Biographical accounts of self-reflections and past, often negative, experiences functioned as a backdrop for feminist identity construction. Despite the disavowal of the notion that feminists are not ordinary women, the feminist participants in this study juxtaposed their identities against other women, especially in the context of criticism voiced against the vision of femininity promoted by some newly emergent media in Poland.

Chapter Ten

Conclusion

In this final chapter I will attempt to tie together the threads of my research project. This is not an easy task as my study involved the examination of different types of data, both textual and ethnographic, that also spanned a broad range of topics, from sex education and sexualisation, to the effect of the systemic change in Poland. In the first section of this chapter I will discuss the common features of interpretative repertoires that I explored in the preceding chapters. In the second section, I will contextualise and position the narrative accounts of my participants as well as the texts I analysed within the larger discursive trends that dominate everyday culture and media in Poland. Here, I will explain how the discourse of romantic love in Poland is embedded within the powerful tradition of the family as a safe haven. In the next sections I will focus on the other major finding of my study, namely the unchallenged discursive dominance of the coital imperative that continues to permeate the commonsensical understandings of human sexuality and sexual expression. In the penultimate section I will re-visit the participant conversations around the sexualisation of culture in Poland, looking at the unique challenges that this phenomenon might have for Poland. Finally, in the last section I will discuss the construction of feminist identities in the context of the shifts in the cultural and political landscape of Poland and in this section I will also explore the scope and potential for future research within the areas touched upon in my study.

Interpretative Repertoires and Self Presentation: Tying the Threads

Discursive narratives of un-readiness threaded through the participants' accounts around the different topics explored in this thesis. Other girls, but predominantly not the participants themselves when they were younger, were constructed as too sexually uneducated, sexualised and misguided by the media to understand what it takes to form intimate and fulfilling romantic and sexual relationships. The positive self-presentation as a sophisticated, discerning, free-thinking and articulate individual was, therefore, achieved through the juxtaposition with other persons that lacked these qualities. The social context in which these identities and counter identities were constructed was perceived often as in need of intervention and improvement, especially within the participants' accounts around sex education in Poland or the role of newly emergent media in the promotion of gender discrimination.

Mature and responsible love based on partnership and egalitarianism was juxtaposed against not being ready for sex or not being in true love. This discursive juxtaposition was manifest both within the interview narratives and the texts analysed here, especially the *Bravo* magazines. The readiness for sex and love were defined nebulously as an instinctive feeling rather than a quality based on age, sexual experience or a partner's declaration of love. In the process of positive self-presentation as mature and discerning individuals informed by the benefit of hindsight, other young women were often constructed as being misguided into believing they were truly in love. Embarking on sexual activity without the presence of true love, especially when it was promiscuous, was constructed as "something precious" being "lost".

Despite this discursive alignment between the magazines and the participants' opinions, one of the main findings of this study was the repudiation of magazines such as *Bravo* and *Cosmopolitan* by the informants in this study. The unique sense of

Polishness was constructed vis-à-vis intellectualism and participants distanced themselves from the "consumer-based emancipated feminine identity" (Lazar 2011) promoted by *Cosmopolitan* while they emphasised individualism and autonomy within the sphere of romantic relationships. As in the Norwegian study that I have discussed in Chapter Two (Itre-Arne 2011), young women here also pointed to undemanding nature of the magazine that allows for "skimming" in a free moment, such as in a dentist surgery or while waiting in road traffic. However, in my study, the magazine was not associated with "relaxation, reward and ritual" but viewed as something that was read once and laughed at out loud or, more extremely, as a source of irritation, especially in relation to the annoying imperative tone.

The "easily put down" quality and "relaxation" were also named as interpretative repertoires in the prominent study of magazine readership by Joke Hermes (1995). Unlike in the Hermes' study, the participants here did not perceive magazines in terms of "emotional learning" or "connected knowing" nor indeed felt reassured by reading about other people's experiences. On the contrary, the respondents in my study perceived the magazines' scripts as too simplistic to reflect the diversity and complexity of existing relationships. Indeed, the participants in my study, despite revealing that they read women's magazines sometimes, aligned themselves with two "non-readers" in the Hermes' (1995, 29) study, one of whom saw that reading of *Libelle* magazine was a sign of "sinking" to its low level, while another stated that it was "unthinkable" by her cultured socialist family that such magazines would be brought into the house.

The penultimate chapter of this work discussed the dilemmas of feminist identification in Poland. Reflecting the discursive, non-unitary nature of meaning-making processes, the discussion in this chapter showed the multitude of meanings that the term "feminist" has for different individuals. What was a common feature of the feminist identification in this research was that the participants, although

acknowledging that they did possess a deeper insight regarding how gender discrimination operated in the media and everyday life, they did not want to be perceived on account of their feminist stance as abnormal, extreme or unfeminine. Their feminist identity construction strategies, therefore, did not stand apart from the wider, positive self-presentation approaches of the participants in this research.

Polish Dimensions of the Romantic Love Discourse

> For years we've been advising her how to take care of herself in order to win him, how to take care of him to make him stay, how to take care of herself to win another when her ex has left her and how to enjoy sex to the hilt with either of them.
>
> Men aren't that complex. The age is completely immaterial. Be they young, old, with short legs or protruding bellies, they can look up the skirts of young girls. They can write whatever they please without causing scandals. But a woman of a certain age must be decent also in her fantasies. Even if she was to die of starvation she mustn't do what every male is naturally permitted.
>
> Women are to be looked at, not men! And where's the equality? Women, like men, have equal rights to look at naked women. Men are a protected species. Men are protected species? But this will change. To tell you the truth, I've had enough of this patriarchy.
>
> I've always been a good girl. From a good girl I've grown naturally into a Polish Mother before I managed to realise that there were also other options. (from *Battle of the Sexes* film released in 2011)

The aim of this thesis has been to explore the contemporary discourses of female sexuality in Poland where the scope of inquiry considered the political, social and cultural transitions that took place in Poland after 1989. One of the most dominant and enduring cultural influences identified by my study was the discourse of romantic love. The above extracts illustrate the diverse discursive influences on the spheres of women's economic and sexual status as well as the central position of the family and the status of heterosexual relationships in Poland. They originate from the recent Polish feature film entitled *Wojna Żeńsko-Męska* (Battle of the Sexes 2011). Here, I use this

film as an illustration for one of the main findings of this study: the specific brand of the romantic love discourse. Hailed as the Polish response to Bridget Jones, it is a story of a women's magazine columnist, Barbara, who has a gay best friend, "weight issues" and the ambition to be a writer. The story begins when Barbara becomes unemployed following an earlier traumatic event when her husband left her for a younger woman. Being left for a younger woman and the following denouncement of heterosexual relationships were also themes in the film *Nigdy w Życiu* (Never in My Life 2004) that I described in Chapter Eight to initially illustrate the Polish romantic love discourse. Unlike in *Never in My Life*, where the building of a house in the country becomes the soul-searching venture, in *Battle of the Sexes*, joblessness and critical family circumstances become a catalyst for the lead protagonist to embark on a bold professional career path. Her ambitions come into fruition very quickly and Barbara soon gains a position in a popular magazine as a sex columnist. Within a few years she becomes a major celebrity in Poland. In the process Barbara increasingly distances herself from her eighteen-year old daughter. She also meets a man who is very interested in her but she does not attach much significance to this event because at that stage her career is given precedence over her personal and family life.

Unlike the story of Bridget Jones, the film initially gives apparent support and plays with a decidedly feminist, rather than a post-feminist sensibility, with the ironic monologues that I quoted at the beginning of this section. Although the film initially gives apparent support to feminist ideas, the plot eventually dispenses with all this, to arrive at the conclusion that all the antagonism between women and men is perfectly natural and inevitable given the gender differences – maybe it even constitutes a part of mutual attraction. The war of the sexes is not a war but a game and the one who loves at least once is the winner. Women need men just as much as men need women. After all, if your husband really loves you, he loves you no matter how much you weigh.

Nowhere could truer happiness be found than in a happy nuclear family and no professional success is really worth anything if you cannot share it with your loved ones. As previously stated, the film follows the predictable scenario of many other scripts in which the female protagonist, after the marriage break-up, swears never to get seriously involved with a man again, only to break this promise in the end because this time it is really the "right one".

The analysis of *Bravo* magazines illustrated how their sex and relationships advice texts predominantly drew on the romantic love discourse. While gender differences, as well as diverse needs and preferences were emphasised, it was also understood that both men and women wish for the happiness of lasting and fulfilling heterosexual relationships where partners share a deep emotional or even spiritual and erotic bond. This is in contrast to the traditional have/hold discourse, which asserts that men are forcefully drawn into committed relationships somewhat against their own will and their masculine nature. And it is this discourse that has a special significance for my research findings because this is where I identified the parallels between the texts that I analysed and the narratives of my participants. Echoing the ideal of true romantic love promoted by the *Bravo* magazines, my respondents talked about different but complementary qualities that men and women bring into relationships and stressed the importance of mutual respect and communication between equal partners. Understanding and communication were especially important during the times when the partners experienced relationship related difficulties.

I argue that this is a specific Polish dimension of the romantic love discourse that is closely aligned with the Polish discourse of gender egalitarianism or even gender comradeship. Firstly, it is specific because it utilises the notion of complementarity of gender traits and roles upon which mutually supportive partnerships are built. This is different from one of the dominant West-originated understandings around the

happiness of heterosexual relationships, voiced within self-help literature such as Gray's *Men Are From Mars and Women Are From Venus* (1992, 1995) series, where the different traits of men and women are considered as potentially disruptive for relationship satisfaction. Young Polish women who I interviewed positioned themselves as active subjects within egalitarian relationships where problems were more often solved by communication and mutual support rather than the reliance on commercial sex advice texts or sex advice professionals. The discourse of relationships based on partnership and the idea that your partner is your best friend on whom you can rely also constitutes a positive alternative to the have/hold discourse (considering its original premises defined by Wendy Hollway in 1984) and the "Mars and Venus" discourse, where gender differences are considered irreconcilable and it is a woman's failure not to realise this. It is within this discourse of egalitarian partnership where there exists perhaps the largest scope to undermine the hegemonic constructions relating to the women's role in gender relations, their pleasure and satisfaction.

Secondly, the Polish romantic love discourse is unique in the way it invokes the specific Polish legacy of gender equality, the importance of educational and professional achievement both for women and men and the high esteem for intellectual expression and creativity discussed in Chapter Three. It is often implied within popular discourse that the notion of gender equality in Poland originates from socialist times and the equality was presumed rather than real. However, as I showed in Chapters One and Three and illustrated with personal cases, equality had a qualitatively specific influence on the everyday expectations and ambitions of many women in Poland. This is not to say that women in Poland, whether during socialism or now, enjoy equal educational or professional status with men but the premise of egalitarianism constitutes one of dominant discourses in Poland that play a part in shaping the attitudes and behaviours of individuals. All participants recruited through student networking sites that I

interviewed had very high educational aspirations to become doctors and lawyers, and therefore, expected to have professional careers and perhaps enter and remain in a full-time employment like the majority of working women in Poland. Incidentally, as previously mentioned in Chapter Three, medicine and law were identified as the occupations that enjoy a very high representation of women in Poland.

Meeting the demands of combining full-time professional involvement as well as domestic responsibilities and motherhood were identified in Chapter Three as one of the greatest challenges for women in Poland today. My participants recognised this area as problematic but also as a place where the progress towards greater egalitarianism and a change in attitudes is gradually taking place. It is here where the reasoned communication between equal partners emphasised by the participants gains special significance and importance. Notably, the model of relationship based on egalitarianism where parenthood was planned and postponed until after the women were educated and had achieved good positions in the job market and where both women and men were taking an active role in the bringing up of their children and sharing domestic chores, was visible in the upmarket glossy women's magazines, as identified by Zaworska-Nikoniuk (2008) and discussed in Chapter Three. Zaworska-Nikoniuk notes further that:

> [M]en highly valued the intellectual powers of women, had similar passions and interests, were learning to concentrate on the spiritual life. If they happened to neglect their families, limiting their roles to the one of breadwinner, in most cases they tried to compensate for this later in their lives. (Zaworska-Nikoniuk 2008, 527)

What was significant, however, was the finding that the discourse of egalitarian romantic love was frequently *reconciled* with the male sexual drive discourse as well as the commonsensical understandings around gender binaries, objectification and sexualisation. Extracts from the *Bravo* magazine as well as an illustrative example from

Filipinka (1979, 17) constructed a social world where there are two types of women. The first are women as a general concept and because they constitute the beautiful sex, they are to be looked at, visually appreciated and evaluated. The second is the significant woman in your life, your girlfriend or your wife, perhaps also your sister or your mother, who are beyond such scrutiny because, as it was stated in the extract from *Filipinka*, they are the ones who remain inviolable and have "personality, soul and heart". Echoing these sentiments, is another previously quoted finding by Zaworska-Nikoniuk (2008) who, proposing the explanation for the inconsistencies within the model of masculinity promoted by the Polish edition of *Cosmopolitan*, suggested that after the initial period of youthful sexual exploits having finally found a suitable wife, the *Cosmo*-guy eventually settles down ready for a long-term commitment.

Another important factor that might account for the strong position of the romantic love discourse in Poland is the central position of family within Polish life. The film discussed above, *Battle of the Sexes*, also demonstrates another important discourse relevant to my research, namely the importance of Polish family values. As discussed earlier in Chapter Three, the family occupies a special place in the national psyche: it is a safe haven that protects individuals from the trials and tribulations of a hostile political and social world outside. The figure of Polish Mother is a central entity here and despite the earlier ironic comment by the film's heroine, she re-embraces this identity wholeheartedly after she is told that her staggering success in the media meant that she abandoned her daughter when the young woman needed her most. The successful career within the media with its corrupting influence, the desire for increasingly more money and fame, is the metaphorical hostile and dangerous world outside, especially as it represents the newly transformed media of capitalism where almost "anything goes". Here, the ideals perceived as imported from the West are repudiated – as noted by Agnieszka Graff (2008) – because they constitute a potential

threat to the Polish tradition where a specific significance is attached to family and parenthood.

The Legacy of the Coital Imperative

> The "textbook sex", uniform, monotonous and ready to be controlled is created within the normative discourse generally from false premises, which – through the power of their repetition almost ad nauseam – convince us at the end not only about their truth but also about the lack of any alternatives. (Valérie Tasso 2008, 17; my translation from the Polish edition of *Antimanual of Sex*)

Echoing Foucault, Valérie Tasso laments that, despite the many modern technological inventions that dominate our lives, our knowledge and understanding about sex has not progressed beyond the normative, linear, phallocentric and reductive model of human sexuality. This also constitutes one of the main findings of my project, namely that the coital imperative is a discursive standard that continues to enjoy an unchallenged privilege over other sexual expressions. In practical terms, this dominant discourse deems that for the majority of heterosexual encounters the decision whether or not to participate in sex is the decision whether or not to participate in coitus rather than in the continuum of other possible sexual activities. Sex continues to be defined as genital intercourse rather than as a flexible, free and diverse choice between a range of practices that are safe, pleasurable and naturally arousing or orgasmic for both women and men.

Although masturbation is set as the main focus of the article in *Charaktery*, coitus is given prominence as the most emotionally enjoyable sexual activity for women. The author of the article backs up her claims with statistics and the subject matter of the discussion are emotional aspects, which after all are subjective, making it harder for a reader to reject the claims. And as I have argued in Chapter Five, the *Charaktery* text does not disrupt the traditional discourse around the centrality of coital

sex and therefore cannot be understood as representing a departure from the conservative heteronormative and gendered ideologies promoted by texts such as *The Art of Loving* by Wisłocka.

The archival editions of *Bravo* magazines, which I also analysed here, are positioned temporally between *The Art of Loving* and the *Charaktery*. They represent a sex advice source that was in the magazine outlets when my respondents were teenagers, that is, when they were the target audience for the magazines. Romanticised accounts of "my first time" that denote invariably the first time to have penis-in-vagina intercourse are a staple facet of these magazines. There is a positive shift in the notable emphasis on other activities that women or young people in general might enjoy but I believe that to consider this shift as significant would be too optimistic, especially in the view of the fact that these magazines are archival and their content might have changed since. A new study exploring these magazines including perhaps both archival and contemporary issues would shed more light on this question.

Although the discursive formulation of relationship happiness based on partnership and egalitarianism was a recurrent feature of the accounts analysed in this study, the explanations around sexuality and sexual behaviour were more tacit and tentative. Indeed, while the participants spoke spontaneously about emotional aspects of relationships, they often stressed that they did not want to form generalisations about normative sexual behaviours, frequently emphasising individuality and diversity of preferences within sexual relationships. At the same time, many respondents expressed the belief that a successful and fulfilling relationship is not possible without coital intercourse and that there is a general "push" towards the culmination of the sexual act by genital penetration. There was also a significant emphasis on the sensual dimensions of female sexuality and the need to seduce and put a woman in the mood for her to be ready to enjoy vaginal intercourse. However, the sexual activities that supported that

aim continued to be constructed as “foreplay” or the preliminaries to the main act of genital intercourse.

Sexualisation

Sexualised dress styles were perceived by the participants in this study as the domain of young, uninformed and developing girls and this phenomenon constituted a transgression of the romantic love discourse because their sexualised expressions remained outside of the context of long-term heterosexual relationships. The behaviours of young women were seen as “doing it the wrong way” that would attract the “wrong kind of guy”. The respondents that I interviewed managed the rhetorical stakes by positioning themselves as the sophisticated agents of their own futures who utilised their knowledge and the lessons that they had learned of what it takes to create the right conditions for successful heterosexual relationships. This positioning was also taken up within some of the *Bravo* texts that I analysed which were written from the perspective of an advice giver, whether this was a psychologist, peer or metaphorical “sister”.

I would like to revisit the discourse of gender differences and their complementarity and especially the notion that a woman’s best quality is her well-maintained physical appearance. It is quite customary in Poland to refer to women as “the beautiful sex”. It is this normalised notion, which deems women as the ones to be looked at and visually admired and men as the appreciative and naturally visually inclined receivers of this beauty, that makes the sexualisation or objectification of women harder to dismantle and challenge. Who after all would like to diminish or speak against things that are inherently beautiful in life? The discursive scripts around sexual conduct and the presentation of women often oscillate between the notion of a

beautiful woman and a fallen woman. This dichotomy, I believe, obscures and complicates what is the most pernicious problem of sexualisation.

The cover of the book from which I quoted in the chapter devoted to the discussion of sexualisation, entitled *Mainstreaming Sex: The Sexualization of Western Culture* (Attwood 2009), features Jo Weldon, Headmistress of the New York School of Burlesque, presumably during one of her burlesque acts, wearing a red corset, red suspenders, long red gloves (one of which is removed seductively and outstretched above her head) and even matching red hair. Despite my negative attitude towards the popularisation of entertainment such as burlesque, I find it difficult not to notice or appreciate the attractive visual and aesthetic dimensions of this image. To give another personal anecdote that further illustrates the complexity of this issue, on one occasion I made a disparaging remark about a woman whom I only knew by sight who appeared at a music festival dressed in a corset and black bloomers, yet again bringing to mind the association with burlesque. My comment elicited severe criticism from another Polish acquaintance who admonished me for claiming to be a feminist whilst judging women by their clothes. Being attractive to oneself and others, rather than experiencing attraction, was constructed by some informants in this study as the sign and expression of female sexuality. These examples illustrate the difficult dilemmas posed by the politics of appearance and sexualisation. These dilemmas notwithstanding, I am troubled by the reductive vision of femininity as an entity that exists mainly for display and the limiting notion of female sexuality as equated with the ability to produce a sexy body (Wade 2010) that are presented to women under the guise of choice. It is not difficult to see that my position here is closely aligned to that presented by the participants who in this study explicitly identified themselves as feminists and whose identities were often constructed in contrast with other women because they chose to pursue sexualised dress styles. As a researcher in this study my aim is to remain critical

and acknowledge that certain aspects of my own as well as my informants' feminist identifications might be constructed upon a narrow and reductive understanding of the identities taken up by some girls and women.

Cultural and Political Shifts in Poland: The Research Lessons and Recommendations

This thesis speaks to the long-standing tradition of qualitative interview studies which show that the explanations and meanings that participants draw upon are not set in stone and fixed but are contextual, fluid and variable. When the meanings are not fixed there is always potential for change and scope for restructuring in the orders of discourse (Fairclough 1992). Poland is a vibrant cultural setting characterised by diverse influences and frequent transformations; therefore it is feasible to imagine that a similar study with a similar group of participants in the near future might highlight a different set of issues.

In the opening section of the conclusion to her doctoral thesis which explored feminist consciousness amongst groups of women in Germany and Britain, Christina Scharff remarks:

> Perhaps this is a somewhat unusual conclusion in that I will open up a new field of inquiry to recap my main arguments. In the time I have been writing my thesis, the contexts in which I conducted the interviews have undergone various transformations. There have been cultural shifts. (Scharff 2009, 290)

Indeed, this is what I can say about my own research setting as well. At the time of writing, another political transformation that might have an impact on the topics researched here took place in Poland. One of the parties elected to the Polish parliament with a ten-percent electoral vote was the Palikot's Movement (October 2011). Janusz Palikot is an entrepreneur turned politician, who supports the removal of religious

education lessons in state schools, the end of state subsidies for churches, the legalisation of abortion on demand, access to free condoms, the legalisation of same-sex civil unions and the legalisation of marijuana. The political success of somebody with such radical views has stirred a mass media sensation. Palikot's extreme and radical opposition to the mainstream politics of Poland might be perceived as an empty promise designed to secure a shock value popularity but the electoral support suggest that there are many people in Poland who support political ideals that are also advocated by feminists.

The feminist identities in this study were constructed not only through the repudiation of some of the newly emergent media but also through the critique of the conservative gender regimes promoted by the Church. In this context, feminist ideology is aligned with what is perceived as a liberal leftist stance that aims to challenge the dominance of religion-informed regressive ideologies within the public sphere and the media in Poland. For example, Adam Szostakiewicz in the Polish current affairs centre-left magazine *Polityka* observes:

> During the martial law, the attendance at Sunday Mass remained at the level of 50–55 per cent. The intelligentsia eagerly attended church. Never before or later was the relationship between a critical Polish intellectual and a traditional Polish Catholic so good. The decline in the attendance started in the 90-ies when the Church engaged savagely in arrogation, vindication and right-wing politics. And so it continues despite the warnings, also from some clergymen and Catholic publicists, that the Church's triumphalism and paternalism will in the long term harm its reputation. (Szostakiewicz 2012, 30)

The repudiation of the Church's ideology became especially pertinent in Chapter Six where the notion of leaving the complexities of sex instruction to specially trained professionals spoke to the ideals of scientific advancement, modernity and progress through education that were promoted during the socialist era and continue to dominate the discourses of post-transformation in Poland. Within this notion, science, the

rationale of the mind and professional knowledge possess the solutions to the problems of sex education, especially the problem of religious bias.

As I have mentioned in Chapter Seven traditional national values based on religion were at times disparaged as regressive but at other times were also mobilised in the process of positive self-presentation as uniquely Polish. These apparently contradictory constructions were, however, aligned across a dimension that could be defined as intellectual sophistication, or put simply, being liberal-minded, educated and discerning. The notion of the sophisticated interplayed with the notion of the uniquely Polish in the context of the narratives around the satisfaction of romantic relationships based on reasoned communication, appreciation of diversity and shared intellectual background. There was an expectation that couples would aspire to greater egalitarianism within the domestic sphere and implicitly that women would pursue full-time employment. West-originated magazines, such as *Cosmopolitan*, were perceived as offering only restricted scripts around the satisfaction of relationships that did not appeal to more sophisticated and discerning readers. Many informants in this study believed that despite the notions of liberation and egalitarianism that were brought in by a new system, some newly-emergent women's magazines promoted inequalities in sexual and domestic spheres by placing unrealistic expectations on women.

This is an explorative study that covered many areas that would benefit from a longer-term focus. However, research that would look deeper into the Polish romantic love discourse interviewing both male and female participants, as well as participants of different ages might be of special interest. Equally, research that would explore the personal experiences of women active within the Polish feminist movement, their impressions about the standing of Polish feminism within the more global spectrum of feminist activism in general might also be especially worthy of its own focus. Another study that would delve deeper into the issue of the sexualisation of culture in Poland

could also shed more light on this extremely interesting and complex phenomenon, especially if the experiences of very young women were considered and the relationship between the ideal of female physical beauty and sexualisation were explored further. If I were to carry out this research project with the benefit of the hindsight that I have today, one – but by no means the only – thing that I would like to change would be to narrow the scope of the interview questions to allow for a more in-depth exploration of the topics around relationship satisfaction and the romantic love discourse. Nevertheless, this thesis has made a contribution to beginning to unravel the complex threads of sexuality and sexual learning in Poland, a national location in which these research areas have been underexplored. The issues of sex education and sexualisation have been widely studied in the Western context and this study provides an insight into these topics from within a setting where these themes have not yet enjoyed similar coverage.

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Appendix 1

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

The study title: Women learning about sex: lessons from the old and new (anti) feminism in Poland

You have volunteered to participate in the above research project conducted by me, Anna Watts. I am a research student based in the Department of Psychology at the Open University, and supervised by Professor Rosalind Gill and Dr Mary Jane Kehily. The project is carried out as part of my PhD degree and the findings of the study will eventually become submitted as part of my final doctoral thesis.

Purpose and your contribution: The aim of my project is to explore representations of female sexuality in sex advice and education materials in Poland. I wish to talk to Polish women in order to find out how they view these representations and make sense of the advice materials in general. To learn about issues of sex and relationship, Polish people have sex education manuals written by eminent sexologists, such as Michalina Wisłocka or Zbigniew Lew-Starowicz, two school sex education textbooks, 'women's' supplement to *Gazeta Wyborcza – Wysokie Obcasy*, as well as the Polish edition of *Cosmopolitan*. They present different models of female sexuality, some apparently liberated and courageous, like those visible in women's magazines such as the *Cosmopolitan*, others more conventional, such as in books by Wisłocka or Zbigniew Lew-Starowicz. But what do Polish female readers really think about them? Are magazines such as *Cosmo* really as sexually liberated as they maintain? Is the best way to learn about sex from magazines? These are some of the many questions that my research will ask.

Procedure: I will be conducting an approximately hour long interview with either you individually or in a group at a quiet and private location. The interview will be more like a discussion with open questions and examples of magazines' articles, pictures, quotes or stories to help. Only the questions that you will feel comfortable talking about will be discussed. Although the interviews will touch upon the potentially sensitive topics of sex education and relationships advice, they will not involve collecting of any personal information, but only opinions about the contents of sex advice materials. The interviews will be conducted in Polish (I am Polish). They will

be audio recorded and then transcribed. Excerpts from the interviews will be translated into English and quoted in my thesis.

Confidentiality: Only I will have access to the interview tapes and transcripts and they will be kept under lock and computer security passwords. After the completion of the study (hopefully by October 2011), any interview material recorded will be destroyed. The only information that will be noted about you apart from your answers will be your age and the level of education. No personal information, such as names or addresses, will be collected and any identifying information will be disguised. Whenever your answers will be quoted in the study, for anonymity purposes, your name will changed, that is a different first name will be used. After the interview, you will have a chance to ask questions about the study and your participation. When the project is completed (approximately in October 2011), if you so wish, I will send you will a brief, one-page summary of the main study outcomes written in accessible language.

You will have right to withdraw your consent to participate without giving a reason up to the point of data aggregation, namely the 1st December 2009. If you do decide to withdraw, the data collected from yourself will not be used.

Questions, comments, complaints: If you wish to discuss further any of the issues surrounding the research, you can contact me at:

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Appendix 2

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of the study: Women learning about sex: lessons from the old and new (anti) feminism in Poland

Investigators' names:
Anna Watts – prime investigator
Professor Rosalind Gill – supervisor
Dr Mary Jane Kehily – supervisor

Please circle as appropriate:

Have you read the Participant Information Sheet? YES / NO

Have you had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study? YES / NO

Have you received enough information about this study? YES / NO

Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the study
- until the 1st December 2009
- and without giving a reason? YES / NO

Do you understand that the topic discussed might be sensitive and will deal with issues of sexual education; however you are asked **not** to disclose any personal information about yourself? YES / NO

Are there any reasons for which the discussion of topics related to sex might cause you any distress or bring up difficult or unresolved personal issues? YES / NO

Do you understand that your participation will be protected by a full confidentiality and anonymity, that is no personal information will be recorded, your name will be changed and any identifying information disguised? YES / NO

Do you agree to take part in this study? YES / NO

Do you agree to have your answers audio recorded? YES / NO

_____ _____

Date Signature of Participant

Appendix 3 Interview Questions

1. If you had some questions about sex, where would you look for the answers? Is there anything that you wish someone had told you about sexual relationships before you first became sexually active?

2. Did you have any sex education lessons at school?

   What did you learn?

   What did you think of the lessons?

   Where else did you learn about sex?

3. Do you read *Cosmopolitan* magazine? What do you think about it? Show an example of a typical *Cosmo* sex article.

4. Show a picture of Doda. What do you think about this picture?

5. When is a woman ready for sex?

   Do you think there should be a formal age of consent?

6. Do you think that people in same-sex relationships should have the same rights as people in heterosexual relationships?

   Talk about non-heterosexual desire using example of two problem letters from *Filipinka*.

   When I walk on the streets, I look not only at men but also at women, especially at their breasts, buttocks and legs. Sometimes, I secretly look into my father's Playboy magazines, which arouse me a lot. When my friend Mary cheated on me, I cried for a few days. I like touching my new friend Kate. I don't like boys much. Am I a lesbian or a bisexual?

7. What do you think about the growing accessibility of pornography?

   My boyfriend watches pornographic films and invites me to watch together. When we were together on holidays he wanted to take me to a nudist beach. I am worried that his behaviours are not really normal.

   Use the above problem letter from *Filipinka* to talk about issues of pornography.

Appendix 4 Interview Quote Prompts

A

A substantial degree of subtlety and diplomacy is required on behalf of a woman in order to manage marital sexual harmony without at the same time hurting the self-love of her partner.

Within the emotional sphere, a woman is a guide and a teacher. The quality of their love will be determined by the kind of love she will create for both of them.

B

Apart from this, the father's duties should include bathing the baby because it gives the father a chance to get used to the intimate contact with the child and get accustomed to him in situations when the infant is the sweetest, the prettiest and usually very playful. The experienced mother also watches over these endeavours of course, passing the baby's clothes, the soap or towels. The third of the father's duties is taking turns with the mother to attend to the child during the night when she cries, so the woman can get some sleep. The fourth duty: a long Sunday-afternoon walk with the child, when the mother prepares the dinner and sorts out her personal hygiene and undergoes any necessary cosmetic procedures so she does not look like a unkempt and neglected slattern at the time when the marriage is going through this difficult and testing time.

C

. . . In such situations, they become brutal and violent. This can lead to events that cannot be reversed.

He hasn't got an influence over the level of his sexual arousal but she should know that all the above-described situations might constitute an open invitation to "rape" and if she does not want to be raped, she should not provide an opportunity for it.

In the first years of the love life together, and also later, it is important to point to the important role of the woman in restraining the sexual ardour of her partner.

D

. . . the first sexual encounters in early puberty (between the age of twelve and sixteen) could lead to psycho-emotional deformation; something that I have termed 'lovelessness'.

E

In medicine it is believed that in general masturbation in puberty is a passing and substitute activity (in the view of lack of normal sexual activity). If it is not too intensive and not accompanied by a sense of a moral conflict (guilt, self-disgust) then it disappears without a trace, when a person assumes a normal and full sexual life.

Too intensive and long-lasting masturbation of women interferes with the adaptation to marriage and normal intercourse. To be more specific, often the technique of masturbation of girls is such, that the level of stimuli, their location and character are completely different and stronger than in a normal sexual intercourse, so that the intercourse does not result in a women achieving an orgasm.

Therefore, not to exaggerate the effects of masturbation, and not to look into it for the causes of infertility, it has to be said that young women are wise to limit it and keep it within a tight reign of a strong will. The danger is also such, that as a result of

masturbation, a young woman learns how to be sexually aroused and how to experience sexual pleasure, so later on it is much easier for a young man to persuade her to take part in a full sexual intercourse, when she does not feel like it and which she for many reasons (personal, moral) regards as undesirable and dangerous.

A person addicted to masturbation is unable to stop certain actions and loses control over his or her behaviour.

F

The termination of pregnancy and its negative consequences can manifest themselves in many ways. Psychological after-effects can lead to emotional desensitisation, when a woman without much hesitation decides to get rid of the baby.

There exists another complication after the termination of pregnancy, not very well known and not often taken into consideration, namely the disorder of sexual frigidity. Smaller or larger infections that enter the uterus and its blood vessels often move further up and settle in the utero-sacral ligaments. And it is exactly inside them where the nerve strands that innervate a woman's reproductive organs run and the stimuli that determine sexual responses are conducted.

A woman in almost every moment of her life dreams about having a baby and motherhood is an always-crucial element of her wellbeing and emotional stability.